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ELLERY QUEEN'S *Mystery Magazine*

32nd ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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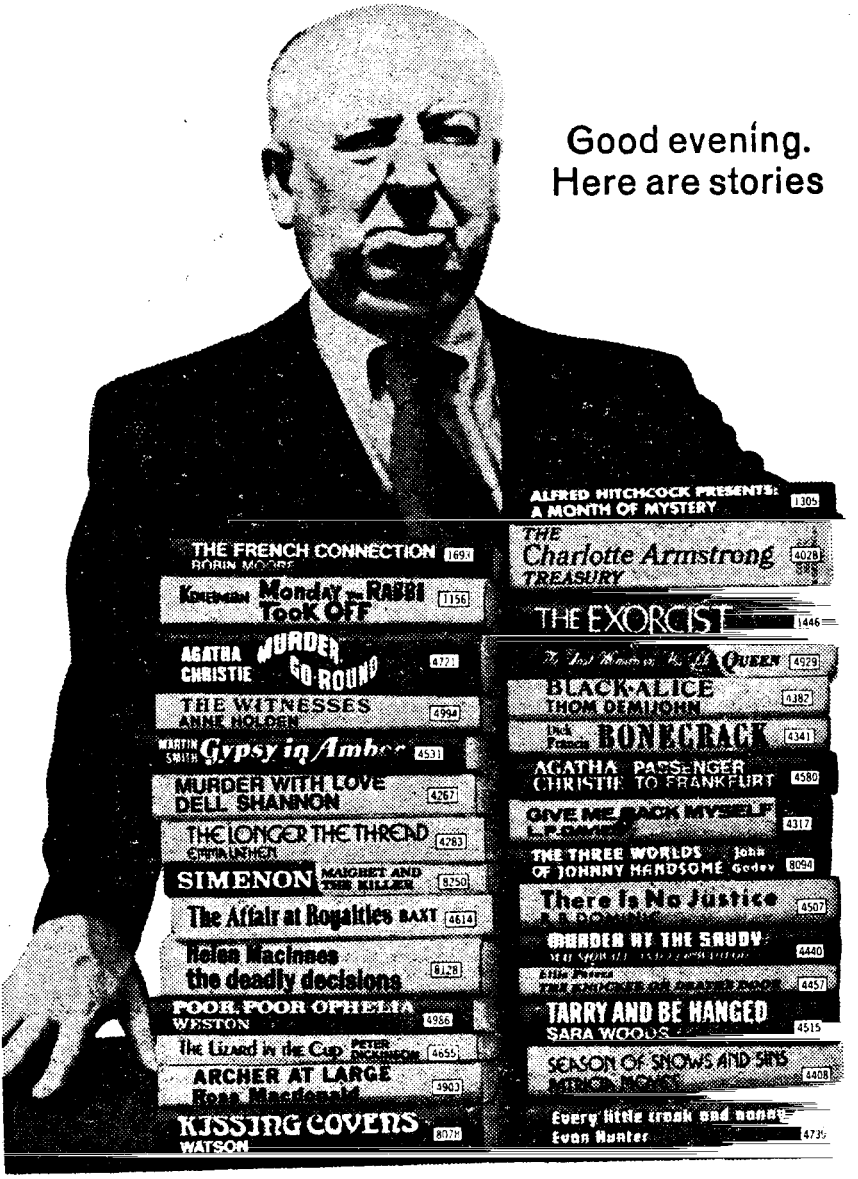
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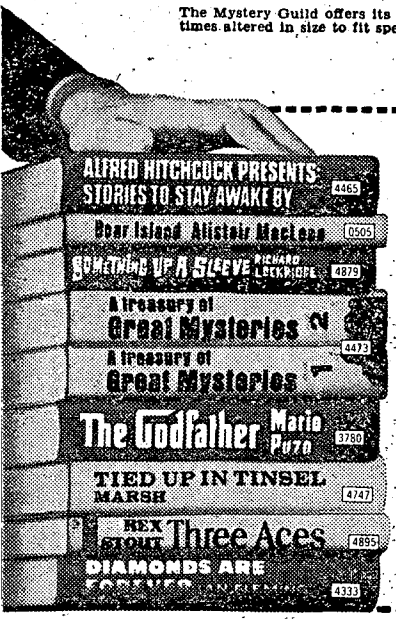

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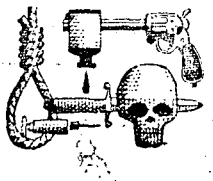

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CHAPTER AND VERSE:

The Little Copplestone Mystery

by NGAIO MARSH

When the telephone rang, Troy came in, sun-dazzled, from the cottage garden to answer it, hoping it would be a call from London.

"Oh," said a strange voice uncertainly. "May I speak to Superintendent Alleyn, if you please?"

"I'm sorry. He's away."

"Oh, dear!" said the voice, crestfallen. "Er—would that be—am I speaking to Mrs. Alleyn?"

"Yes."

"Oh. Yes. Well, it's Timothy Bates here, Mrs. Alleyn. You don't know me," the voice confessed wistfully, "but I had the pleasure several years ago of meeting your husband. In New Zealand. And he did say that if I ever came home I was to get in touch, and when I heard quite by accident that you were here—well, I *was* excited. But, alas, no good after all."

"I *am* sorry," Troy said. "He'll be back, I hope, on Sunday night. Perhaps—"

"Will he! Come, *that's* something! Because here I am at the Star & Garter, you see, and so—" The voice trailed away again.

"Yes, indeed. He'll be delighted," Troy said, hoping that he would.

"I'm a bookman," the voice confided. "Old books, you know. He used to come into my shop. It was always such a pleasure."

"But, of course!" Troy exclaimed. "I remember perfectly now. He's often talked about it."

"*Has* he? Has he, really! Well, you see, Mrs. Alleyn, I'm here on business. Not to *sell* anything, please don't think that, but on a voyage of discovery; almost, one might say, of detection, and I think it might amuse him. He has such an eye for the curious. Not," the voice hurriedly amended, "in the trade sense. I mean curious in the sense of mysterious and unusual. But I mustn't bore you."

Troy assured him that he was not boring her and indeed it was true. The voice was so much colored by odd little overtones that she found herself

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quite drawn to its owner. "I know where you are," he was saying. "Your house was pointed out to me."

After that there was nothing to do but ask him to visit. He seemed to cheer up prodigiously. "May I? May I, really? Now?"

"Why not?" Troy said. "You'll be here in five minutes."

She heard a little crow of delight before he hung up the receiver.

He turned out to be exactly like his voice—a short, middle-aged, bespectacled man, rather untidily dressed. As he came up the path she saw that with both arms he clutched to his stomach an enormous Bible. He was thrown into a fever over the difficulty of removing his cap.

"How ridiculous!" he exclaimed. "Forgive me! One moment."

He laid his burden tenderly on a garden seat. "There!" he cried. "Now! How do you do!"

Troy took him indoors and gave him a drink. He chose sherry and sat in the window seat with his Bible beside him. "You'll wonder," he said, "why I've appeared with this unusual piece of baggage. I *do* trust it arouses your curiosity."

He went into a long excitable explanation. It appeared that the Bible was an old and rare one that he had picked up in a job lot of books in New Zealand. All this time he kept it under his square little hands as if it might open of its own accord and spoil his story.

"Because," he said, "the *really* exciting thing to me is *not* its undoubted authenticity but—" He made a conspiratorial face at Troy and suddenly opened the Bible. "Look!" he invited.

He displayed the flyleaf. Troy saw that it was almost filled with entries in a minute faded copperplate handwriting.

"The top," Mr. Bates cried. "Top left-hand. Look at *that.*"

Troy read: "*Crabtree Farm at Little Copplestone in the County of Kent.* Why, it comes from our village!"

"Ah, ha! So it does. Now, the entries, my dear Mrs. Alleyn. The entries."

They were the recorded births and deaths of a family named Wagstaff, beginning in 1705 and ending in 1870 with the birth of Charles James Wagstaff. Here they broke off but were followed by three further entries, close together.

Stewart Shakespeare Hadet. Died: Tuesday, 5th April, 1779. 2nd Samuel 1.10.

Naomi Balbus Hadet. Died: Saturday, 13th August, 1779. Jeremiah 50.24.

Peter Rook Hadet. Died:

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Monday, 12th September, 1779. Ezekiel 7:6."

Troy looked up to find Mr. Bates's gaze fixed on her. "And what," Mr. Bates asked, "my dear Mrs. Alleyn, do you make of *that?*"

"Well," she said cautiously, "I know about Crabtree Farm. There's the farm itself, owned by Mr. De'ath, and there's Crabtree House, belonging to Miss Hart, and—yes, I fancy I've heard they both belonged originally to a family named Wagstaff."

"You are perfectly right. Now! What about the Hadets? What about *them?*"

"I've never heard of a family named Hadet in Little Copplestone. But—"

"Of course, you haven't. For the very good reason that there never have been any Hadets in Little Copplestone."

"Perhaps in New Zealand, then?"

"The dates, my dear Mrs. Alleyn, the dates! New Zealand was not colonized in 1779. Look closer. Do you see the sequence of double dots—ditto marks—under the address? Meaning, of course, 'also of Crabtree Farm at Little Copplestone in the County of Kent'."

"I suppose so."

"Of course you do. And how right you are. Now! You have noticed that throughout there are biblical references. For the Wagstaffs they are the usual pious offerings. You need not trouble yourself with them. But consult the texts awarded to the three Hadets. Just you look *them* up! I've put markers."

He threw himself back with an air of triumph and sipped his sherry. Troy turned over the heavy bulk of pages to the first marker. "Second of Samuel, one, ten," Mr. Bates prompted, closing his eyes.

The verse had been faintly underlined.

"*So I stood upon him,*" Troy read, "*and slew him.*"

"That's Stewart Shakespeare Hadet's valedictory," said Mr. Bates. "Next!"

The next was at the 50th chapter of Jeremiah, verse 24: *I have laid a snare for thee and thou are taken.*

Troy looked at Mr. Bates. His eyes were still closed and he was smiling faintly.

"That was Naomi Balbus Hadet," he said. "Now for Peter Rook Hadet. Ezekiel, seven, six."

The pages flopped back to the last marker.

"*An end is come, the end is come: it watcheth for thee; behold it is come.*"

Troy shut the Bible.

"How very unpleasant," she said.

"And how very intriguing,

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don't you think?" And when she didn't answer, "Quite up your husband's street, it seemed to me."

"I'm afraid," Troy said, "that even Rory's investigations don't go back to 1779."

"What a pity!" Mr. Bates cried gaily.

"Do I gather that you conclude from all this that there was dirty work among the Hadets in 1779?"

"I don't know, but I'm dying to find out. *Dying* to. Thank you, I should enjoy another glass. Delicious!"

He had settled down so cosily and seemed to be enjoying himself so much that Troy was constrained to ask him to stay to lunch.

"Miss Hart's coming," she said. "She's the one who bought Crabtree House from the Wagstaffs. If there's any gossip to be picked up in Copplestone, Miss Hart's the one for it. She's coming about a painting she wants me to donate to the Harvest Festival raffle."

Mr. Bates was greatly excited. "Who knows!" he cried. "A Wagstaff in the hand may be worth two Hadets in the bush. I am your slave forever, my dear Mrs. Alleyn!"

Miss Hart was a lady of perhaps 67 years. On meeting Mr. Bates she seemed to imply that some explanation should be advanced for Troy receiving a gentleman caller in her husband's absence. When the Bible was produced, she immediately accepted it in this light, glanced with professional expertise at the inscriptions and fastened on the Wagstaffs.

"No doubt," said Miss Hart, "it was their family Bible and much good it did them. A most eccentric lot they were. Very unsound. Very unsound, indeed. Especially Old Jimmy."

"Who," Mr. Bates asked greedily, "was Old Jimmy?"

Miss Hart jabbed her forefinger at the last of the Wagstaff entries. "Charles James Wagstaff. Born 1870. And died, although it doesn't say so, in April, 1921. Nobody was left to complete the entry, of course. Unless you count the niece, which I don't. Baggage, if ever I saw one."

"The niece?"

"Fanny Wagstaff. Orphan. Old Jimmy brought her up. Dragged would be the better word. Drunken old reprobate he was and he came to a drunkard's end. They said he beat her *and* I daresay she needed it." Miss Hart lowered her voice to a whisper and confided in Troy. "Not a *nice* girl. You know what I mean."

Troy, feeling it was expected

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of her, nodded portentously.

"A drunken end, did you say?" prompted Mr. Bates.

"Certainly. On a Saturday night after Market. Fell through the top-landing stair rail in his nightshirt and split his skull on the flagstoned hall."

"And your father bought it, then, after Old Jimmy died?" Troy ventured.

"Bought the house and garden. Richard De'ath took the farm. He'd been after it for years—wanted it to round off his own place. He and Old Jimmy were at daggers-drawn over *that* business. And, of course, Richard being an atheist, over the Seven Seals."

"I beg your pardon?" Mr. Bates asked.

"Blasphemous!" Miss Hart shouted. "That's what it was, rank blasphemy. It was a sect that Wagstaff founded. If the rector had known his business he'd have had him excommunicated for it."

Miss Hart was prevented from elaborating this theory by the appearance at the window of an enormous woman, stuffily encased in black, with a face like a full moon.

"Anybody at home?" the newcomer playfully chanted. "Telegram for a lucky girl! Come and get it!"

It was Mrs. Simpson, the village postmistress. Miss Hart said, "Well, *really!*" and gave an acid laugh.

"Sorry, I'm sure," said Mrs. Simpson, staring at the Bible which lay under her nose on the window seat. "I didn't realize there was company. Thought I'd pop it in as I was passing."

Troy read the telegram while Mrs. Simpson, panting, sank heavily on the window ledge and eyed Mr. Bates who had drawn back in confusion. "I'm no good in the heat," she told him. "Slays me."

"Thank you so much, Mrs. Simpson," Troy said. "No answer."

"Righty-ho. Cheerie-bye," said Mrs. Simpson and with another stare at Mr. Bates and the Bible, and a derisive grin at Miss Hart, she waddled away.

"It's from Rory," Troy said. "He'll be home on Sunday evening."

"*As* that woman will no doubt inform the village," Miss Hart pronounced. "A busybody of the first water and ought to be taught her place. Did you ever!"

She fulminated throughout luncheon and it was with difficulty that Troy and Mr. Bates persuaded her to finish her story of the last of the Wagstaffs. It appeared that Old Jimmy had died intestate, his niece succeeding. She had at once announced her intention

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of selling everything and had left the district to pursue, Miss Hart suggested, a life of freedom, no doubt in London or even in Paris. Miss Hart wouldn't, and didn't want to, know. On the subject of the Hadets, however, she was uninformed and showed no inclination to look up the marked Bible references attached to them.

After luncheon Troy showed Miss Hart three of her paintings, any one of which would have commanded a high price at an exhibition of contemporary art, and Miss Hart chose the one that, in her own phrase, really did look like something. She insisted that Troy and Mr. Bates accompany her to the parish hall where Mr. Bates would meet the rector, an authority on village folklore. Troy in person must hand over her painting to be raffled.

Troy would have declined this honor if Mr. Bates had not retired behind Miss Hart and made a series of beseeching gestures and grimaces. They set out therefore in Miss Hart's car which was crammed with vegetables for the Harvest Festival decorations.

"And if the woman Simpson thinks she's going to hog the lectern with *her* pumpkins," said Miss Hart, "she's in for a shock. Hah!"

St. Cuthbert's was an ancient parish church round whose flanks the tiny village nestled. Its tower, an immensely high one, was said to be unique. Nearby was the parish hall where Miss Hart pulled up with a masterful jerk.

Troy and Mr. Bates helped her unload some of her lesser marrows to be offered for sale within. They were observed by a truculent-looking man in tweeds who grinned at Miss Hart. "Burnt offerings," he jeered, "for the tribal gods, I perceive." It was Mr. Richard De'ath, the atheist. Miss Hart cut him dead and led the way into the hall.

Here they found the rector, with a crimson-faced elderly man and a clutch of ladies engaged in preparing for the morrow's sale.

The rector was a thin gentle person, obviously frightened of Miss Hart and timidly delighted by Troy. On being shown the Bible he became excited and dived at once into the story of Old Jimmy Wagstaff.

"Intemperate, I'm afraid, in everything," sighed the rector. "Indeed, it would not be too much to say that he both preached and drank hellfire. He *did* preach, on Saturday nights at the crossroads outside the Star and Garter. Drunken, blasphemous nonsense it was

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and although he used to talk about his followers, the only one he could claim was his niece, Fanny, who was probably too much under his thumb to refuse him."

"William Pilbrow," Miss Hart announced, jerking her head at the elderly man who had come quite close to them. "Drowned him with his bell. They had a fight over it. Deaf as a post," she added, catching sight of Mr. Bates's startled expression. "He's the verger now. *And* the town crier."

"What!" Mr. Bates exclaimed.

"Oh, yes," the rector explained. "The village is endowed with a town crier." He went over to Mr. Pilbrow who at once cupped his hand round his ear. The rector yelled into it.

"When did you start crying, William?"

"Twenty-ninth September, 'twenty-one," Mr. Pilbrow roared back.

"I thought so."

There was something in their manner that made it difficult to remember, Troy thought, that they were talking about events that were almost fifty years back in the past. Even the year 1779 evidently seemed to them to be not so long ago, but, alas, none of them knew of any Hadets.

"By all means," the rector invited Mr. Bates, "consult the church records, but I can assure you—no Hadets. Never any Hadets."

Troy saw an expression of extreme obstinacy settle round Mr. Bates's mouth.

The rector invited him to look at the church and as they both seemed to expect Troy to tag along, she did so. In the lane they once more encountered Mr. Richard De'ath out of whose pocket protruded a paper-wrapped bottle. He touched his cap to Troy and glared at the rector who turned pink and said, "Afternoon, De'ath," and hurried on.

Mr. Bates whispered imploringly to Troy, "*Would* you mind? I *do* so want to have a word—" and she was obliged to introduce him. It was not a successful encounter. Mr. Bates no sooner broached the topic of his Bible, which he still carried, than Mr. De'ath burst into an alcoholic diatribe against superstition, and on the mention of Old Jimmy Wagstaff, worked himself up into such a state of reminiscent fury that Mr. Bates was glad to hurry away with Troy.

They overtook the rector in the churchyard, now bathed in the golden opulence of an already westering sun.

"There they all lie," the

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rector said, waving a fatherly hand at the company of headstones. "All your Wagstaffs, right back to the Sixteenth Century. But no Hadets, Mr. Bates, I assure you."

They stood looking up at the spire. Pigeons flew in and out of a balcony far above their heads. At their feet was a little flagged area edged by a low coping. Mr. Bates stepped forward and the rector laid a hand on his arm.

"Not there," he said. "Do you mind?"

"Don't!" bellowed Mr. Pilbrow from the rear. "Don't you set foot on them bloody stones, Mister."

Mr. Bates backed away.

"William's not swearing," the rector mildly explained. "He is to be taken, alas, literally. A sad and dreadful story, Mr. Bates."

"Indeed?" Mr. Bates asked eagerly.

"Indeed, yes. Some time ago, in the very year we have been discussing—1921, you know—one of our girls, a very beautiful girl she was, named Ruth Wall, fell from the balcony of the tower and was, of course, killed. She used to go up there to feed the pigeons and it was thought that in leaning over the low balustrade she overbalanced."

"Ah!" Mr. Pilbrow roared with considerable relish, evidently guessing the purport of the rector's speech. "Terrible, terrible! And 'er sweetheart after'er, too. Terrible!"

"Oh, no!" Troy protested.

The rector made a dabbing gesture to subdue Mr. Pilbrow. "I wish he wouldn't," he said. "Yes. It was a few days later. A lad called Simon Castle. They were to be married. People said it must be suicide but—it may have been wrong of me—I couldn't bring myself—in short, he lies beside her over there. If you would care to look."

For a minute or two they stood before the headstones.

"Ruth Wall. Spinster of this Parish. 1903-1921. *I will extend peace to her like a river.*"

"Simon Castle. Bachelor of this Parish. 1900-1921. *And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*"

The afternoon having by now worn on, and the others having excused themselves, Mr. Bates remained alone in the churchyard, clutching his Bible and staring at the headstones. The light of the hunter's zeal still gleamed in his eyes.

Troy didn't see Mr. Bates again until Sunday night service when, on her way up the aisle, she passed him, sitting in the rearmost pew. She was amused to observe that his gigantic Bible was under the seat.

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"*We plow the fields,*" sang the choir, "*and scatter—*" Mrs. Simpson roared away on the organ, the smell of assorted greengrocery rising like some humble incense. Everybody in Little Copplestone except Mr. Richard De'ath was there for the Harvest Festival. At last the rector stepped over Miss Hart's biggest pumpkin and ascended the pulpit, William Pilbrow switched off all the lights except one and they settled down for the sermon.

"A sower went forth to sow," announced the rector. He spoke simply and well but somehow Troy's attention wandered. She found herself wondering where, through the centuries, the succeeding generations of Wagstaffs had sat until Old Jimmy took to his freakish practices; and whether Ruth Wall and Simon Castle, poor things, had shared the same hymnbook and held hands during the sermon; and whether, after all, Stewart Shakespeare Hadet and Peter Rook Hadet had not, in 1779, occupied some dark corner of the church and been unaccountably forgotten.

Here we are, Troy thought drowsily, and there, outside in the churchyard are all the others going back and back—"

She saw a girl, bright in the evening sunlight, reach from a balcony toward a multitude of wings. She was falling—dreadfully—into nothingness. Troy woke with a sickening jerk.

"—on stony ground," the rector was saying. Troy listened guiltily to the rest of the sermon.

Mr. Bates emerged on the balcony. He laid his Bible on the coping and looked at the moonlit tree tops and the churchyard so dreadfully far below. He heard someone coming up the stairway. Torchlight danced on the door jamb

"You were quick," said the visitor.

"I am all eagerness and, I confess, puzzlement."

"It had to be here, on the spot. If you *really* want to find out—"

"But I do, I do!"

"We haven't much time. You've brought the Bible?"

"You particularly asked—"

"If you'd open it at Ezekiel, chapter twelve. I'll shine my torch."

Mr. Bates opened the Bible.

"The thirteenth verse. There!"

Mr. Bates leaned forward The Bible tipped and moved.

"Look out!" the voice urged.

Mr. Bates was scarcely aware of the thrust. He felt the page tear as the book sank under his

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hands. The last thing he heard was the beating of a multitude of wings.

"—and forevermore," said the rector in a changed voice, facing east. The congregation got to its feet. He announced the last hymn. Mrs. Simpson made a preliminary rumble and Troy groped in her pocket for the collection plate. Presently they all filed out into the autumnal moonlight.

It was coldish in the churchyard. People stood about in groups. One or two had already moved through the lychgate. Troy heard a voice, which she recognized as that of Mr. De'ath. "I suppose," it jeered, "you all know you've been assisting at a fertility rite."

"Drunk as usual, Dick De'ath," somebody returned without rancor. There was a general laugh.

They had all begun to move away when, from the shadows at the base of the church tower, there arose a great cry. They stood, transfixed, turned toward the voice.

Out of the shadows came the rector in his cassock. When Troy saw his face she thought he must be ill and went to him.

"No, no!" he said. "Not a woman! William! Where's William Pilbrow?"

Behind him, at the foot of the tower, was a pool of darkness; but Troy, having come closer, could see within it a figure, broken like a puppet on the flagstones. An eddy of night air stole round the church and fluttered a page of the giant Bible that lay pinned beneath the head.

It was nine o'clock when Troy heard the car pull up outside the cottage. She saw her husband coming up the path and ran to meet him, as if they had been parted for months.

He said, "This is mighty gratifying!" And then, "Hullo, my love. What's the matter?"

As she tumbled out her story, filled with relief at telling him, a large man with uncommonly bright eyes came up behind them.

"Listen to this, Fox," Roderick Alleyn said. "We're in demand, it seems." He put his arm through Troy's and closed his hand round hers. "Let's go indoors, shall we? Here's Fox, darling, come for a nice bucolic rest. Can we give him a bed?"

Troy pulled herself together and greeted Inspector Fox. Presently she was able to give them a coherent account of the evening's tragedy. When she had finished, Alleyn said, "Poor little Bates. He was a nice little bloke." He put his hand on Troy's. "You need a drink," he

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said, "and so, by the way, do we."

While he was getting the drinks he asked quite casually, "You've had a shock and a beastly one at that, but there's something else, isn't there?"

"Yes," Troy swallowed hard, "there is. They're all saying it's an accident."

"Yes?"

"And Rory, I don't think it is."

Mr. Fox cleared his throat. "Fancy," he said.

"Suicide?" Alleyn suggested, bringing her drink to her.

"No. Certainly not."

"A bit of rough stuff, then?"

"You sound as if you're asking about the sort of weather we've been having."

"Well, darling, you don't expect Fox and me to go into hysterics. Why not an accident?"

"He knew all about the other accidents, he *knew* it was dangerous. And then the oddness of it, Rory. To leave the Harvest Festival service and climb the tower in the dark, carrying that enormous Bible!"

"And he was hell-bent on tracing these Hadets?"

"Yes. He kept saying you'd be interested. He actually brought a copy of the entries for you."

"Have you got it?"

She found it for him. "The selected texts," he said, "are pretty rum, aren't they, Br'er Fox?" and handed it over.

"Very vindictive," said Mr. Fox.

"Mr. Bates thought it was in your line," Troy said.

"The devil he did! What's been done about this?"

"The village policeman was in the church. They sent for the doctor. And—well, you see, Mr. Bates had talked a lot about you and they hope you'll be able to tell them something about him—whom they should get in touch with and so on."

"Have they moved him?"

"They weren't going to until the doctor had seen him."

Alleyn pulled his wife's ear and looked at Fox. "Do you fancy a stroll through the village, Foxkin?"

"There's a lovely moon," Fox said bitterly and got to his feet.

The moon was high in the heavens when they came to the base of the tower and it shone on a group of four men—the rector, Richard De'ath, William Pilbrow, and Sergeant Botting, the village constable. When they saw Alleyn and Fox, they separated and revealed a fifth who was kneeling by the body of Timothy Bates.

"Kind of you to come," the rector said, shaking hands with

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Alleyn. "And a great relief to all of us."

Their manner indicated that Alleyn's arrival would remove a sense of personal responsibility. "If you'd like to have a look—?" the doctor said.

The broken body lay huddled on its side. The head rested on the open Bible. The right hand, rigid in cadaveric spasm, clutched a torn page. Alleyn knelt and Fox came closer with the torch. At the top of the page Alleyn saw the word Ezekiel and a little farther down, Chapter 12.

Using the tip of his finger Alleyn straightened the page. "Look," he said, and pointed to the thirteenth verse. "*My net also will I spread upon him and he shall be taken in my snare.*"

The words had been faintly underlined in mauve.

Alleyn stood up and looked round the circle of faces.

"Well," the doctor said, "we'd better see about moving him."

Alleyn said, "I don't think he should be moved just yet."

"Not!" the rector cried out. "But surely—to leave him like this—I mean, after this terrible accident—"

"It has yet to be proved," Alleyn said, "that it was an accident."

There was a sharp sound from Richard De'ath.

"—and I fancy," Alleyn went on, glancing at De'ath, "that it's going to take quite a lot of proving."

After that, events, as Fox observed with resignation, took the course that was to be expected. The local Superintendent said that under the circumstances it would be silly not to ask Alleyn to carry on, the Chief Constable agreed, and appropriate instructions came through from Scotland Yard. The rest of the night was spent in routine procedure. The body having been photographed and the Bible set aside for finger-printing, both were removed and arrangements put in hand for the inquest.

At dawn Alleyn and Fox climbed the tower. The winding stair brought them to an extremely narrow doorway through which they saw the countryside lying vaporous in the faint light. Fox was about to go through to the balcony when Alleyn stopped him and pointed to the door jambs. They were covered with a growth of stonecrop.

About three feet from the floor this had been brushed off over a space of perhaps four inches and fragments of the microscopic plant hung from the scars. From among these, on either side, Alleyn removed

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morsels of dark-colored thread. "And here," he sighed, "as sure as fate, we go again. O Lord, O Lord!"

They stepped through to the balcony and there was a sudden whirr and beating of wings as a company of pigeons flew out of the tower. The balcony was narrow and the balustrade indeed very low. "If there's any looking over," Alleyn said, "you, my dear Foxkin, may do it."

Nevertheless he leaned over the balustrade and presently knelt beside it. "Look at this. Bates rested the open Bible here—blow me down flat if he didn't! There's a powder of leather where it scraped on the stone and a fragment where it tore. It must have been moved—outward. Now, why, *why?*"

"Shoved it accidentally with his knees, then made a grab and overbalanced?"

"But why put the open Bible there? To read by moonlight? *My net also will I spread upon him and he shall be taken in my snare.* Are you going to tell me he underlined it and then dived overboard?"

"I'm not going to tell you anything," Fox grunted and then: "That old chap William Pilbrow's down below swabbing the stones. He looks like a beetle."

"Let him look like a rhinoceros if he wants to, but for the love of Mike don't leer over the edge—you give me the willies. Here, let's pick this stuff up before it blows away."

They salvaged the scraps of leather and put them in an envelope. Since there was nothing more to do, they went down and out through the vestry and so homé to breakfast.

"Darling," Alleyn told his wife, "you've landed us with a snorter."

"Then you *do* think—?"

"There's a certain degree of fishiness. Now, see here, wouldn't *somebody* have noticed little Bates get up and go out? I know he sat all alone on the back bench, but wasn't there *someone?*"

"The rector?"

"No. I asked him. Too intent on his sermon, it seems."

"Mrs. Simpson? If she looks through her little red curtain she faces the nave."

"We'd better call on her, Fox. I'll take the opportunity to send a couple of cables to New Zealand. She's fat, jolly, keeps the shop-cum-postoffice, and is supposed to read all the postcards. Just your cup of tea. You're dynamite with postmistresses. Away we go."

Mrs. Simpson sat behind her

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counter doing a crossword puzzle and refreshing herself with licorice. She welcomed Alleyn with enthusiasm. He introduced Fox and then he retired to a corner to write out his cables.

"What a catastrophe!" Mrs. Simpson said, plunging straight into the tragedy. "Shocking! As nice a little gentleman as you'd wish to meet, Mr. Fox. Typical New Zealander. Pick him a mile away and a friend of Mr. Alleyn's, I'm told, and if I've said it once I've said it a hundred times, Mr. Fox, they ought to have put something up to prevent it. Wire netting or a bit of ironwork; but, no, they let it go on from year to year and now see what's happened—history repeating itself and giving the village a bad name. Terrible!"

Fox bought a packet of tobacco from Mrs. Simpson and paid her a number of compliments on the layout of her shop modulating from there into an appreciation of the village He said that one always found such pleasant company in small communities. Mrs. Simpson was impressed and offered him a piece of licorice.

"As for pleasant company," she chuckled, "that's as may be, though by and large I suppose I mustn't grumble. I'm a cockney and a stranger here myself, Mr. Fox. Only twenty-four years and that doesn't go for anything with this lot."

"Ah," Fox said, "then you wouldn't recollect the former tragedies. Though to be sure," he added, "you wouldn't do that in any case, being much too young, if you'll excuse the liberty, Mrs. Simpson."

After this classic opening Alleyn was not surprised to hear Mrs. Simpson embark on a retrospective survey of life in Little Copplestone. She was particularly lively on Miss Hart who, she hinted, had had her eye on Mr. Richard De'ath for many a long day.

"As far back as when Old Jimmy Wagstaff died, which was why she was so set on getting the next-door house; but Mr. De'ath never looked at anybody except Ruth Wall, and her head-over-heels in love with young Castle, which together with her falling to her destruction when feeding pigeons led Mr. De'ath to forsake religion and take to drink, which he has done something cruel ever since.

"They do say he's got a terrible temper, Mr. Fox, and it's well known he give Old Jimmy Wagstaff a thrashing on account of straying cattle and threatened young Castle, saying if he couldn't have Ruth

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nobody else would, but fair's fair and personally I've never seen him anything but nice-mannered, drunk or sober. Speak as you find's my motto and always has been, but these old maids, when they take a fancy they get it pitiful hard. You wouldn't know a word of nine letters meaning 'palefaced lure like a sprat in a fishy story,' would you?"

Fox was speechless, but Alleyn, emerging with his cables, suggested "whitebait."

"Correct!" shouted Mrs. Simpson. "Fits like a glove. Although it's not a bit like a sprat and a quarter the size. Cheating, I call it. Still, it fits." She licked her indelible pencil and triumphantly added it to her crossword.

They managed to lead her back to Timothy Bates. Fox, professing a passionate interest in organ music, was able to extract from her that when the rector began his sermon she had in fact dimly observed someone move out of the back bench and through the doors. "He must have walked round the church and in through the vestry and little did I think he was going to his death," Mrs. Simpson said with considerable relish and a sigh like an earthquake.

"You didn't happen to hear him in the vestry?" Fox ventured, but it appeared that the door from the vestry into the organ loft was shut and Mrs. Simpson, having settled herself to enjoy the sermon with, as she shamelessly admitted, a bag of chocolates, was not in a position to notice.

Alleyn gave her his two cables: the first to Timothy Bates's partner in New Zealand and the second to one of his own colleagues in that country asking for any available information about relatives of the late Charles James Wagstaff of Little Copplestone, Kent, possibly resident in New Zealand after 1921, and of any persons of the name of Peter Rook Hadet or Naomi Balbus Hadet.

Mrs. Simpson agitatedly checked over the cables, professional etiquette and burning curiosity struggling together in her enormous bosom. She restrained herself, however, merely observing that an event of this sort set you thinking, didn't it?

"And no doubt," Alleyn said as they walked up the lane, "she'll be telling her customers that the next stop's bloodhounds and manacles."

"Quite a tidy armful of lady, isn't she, Mr. Alleyn?" Fox calmly rejoined.

The inquest was at 10:20 in the smoking room of the Star &

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Garter. With half an hour in hand, Alleyn and Fox visited the churchyard. Alleyn gave particular attention to the headstones of Old Jimmy Wagstaff, Ruth Wall, and Simon Castle. "No mention of the month or day," he said. And after a moment: "I wonder. We must ask the rector."

"No need to ask the rector," said a voice behind them. It was Miss Hart. She must have come soundlessly across the soft turf. Her air was truculent. "Though why," she said, "it should be of interest, I'm sure I don't know. Ruth Wall died on August thirteenth, 1921. It was a Saturday."

"You've a remarkable memory," Alleyn observed.

"Not as good as it sounds. That Saturday afternoon I came to do the flowers in the church. I found her and I'm not likely ever to forget it. Young Castle went the same way almost a month later. September twelfth. In my opinion there was never a more glaring case of suicide. I believe," Miss Hart said harshly, "in facing facts."

"She was a beautiful girl, wasn't she?"

"I'm no judge of beauty. She set the men by the ears. *He* was a fine-looking young fellow. Fanny Wagstaff did her best to get *him*."

"Had Ruth Wall," Alleyn asked, "other admirers?"

Miss Hart didn't answer and he turned to her. Her face was blotted with an unlovely flush. "She ruined two men's lives, if you want to know. Castle and Richard De'ath," said Miss Hart. She turned on her heel and without another word marched away.

"September twelfth," Alleyn murmured. "That would be a Monday, Br'er Fox."

"So it would," Fox agreed, after a short calculation, "so it would. Quite a coincidence."

"Or not, as the case may be. I'm going to take a gamble on this one. Come on."

They left the churchyard and walked down the lane, overtaking William Pilbrow on the way. He was wearing his town crier's coat and hat and carrying his bell by the clapper. He manifested great excitement when he saw them.

"Hey!" he shouted, "what's this I hear? Murder's the game, is it? What a go! Come on, gents, let's have it. Did 'e fall or was 'e pushed? Hor, hor, hor! Come on."

"Not till after the inquest," Alleyn shouted.

"Do we get a look at the body?"

"Shut up," Mr. Fox bellowed suddenly.

"I got to know, haven't I? It'll be the smartest bit of

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crying I ever done, this will! I reckon I might get on the telly with this. 'Town crier tells old-world village death stalks the churchyard.' Hor, hor, hor!"

"Let us," Alleyn whispered, "leave this horrible old man."

They quickened their stride and arrived at the pub to be met with covert glances and dead silence.

The smoking room was crowded for the inquest. Everybody was there, including Mrs. Simpson who sat in the back row with her candies and her crossword puzzle. It went through very quickly. The rector deposed to finding the body. Richard De'ath, sober and less truculent than usual, was questioned as to his sojourn outside the churchyard and said he'd noticed nothing unusual apart from hearing a disturbance among the pigeons roosting in the balcony. From where he stood, he said, he couldn't see the face of the tower.

An open verdict was recorded.

Alleyn had invited the rector, Miss Hart, Mrs. Simpson, Richard De'ath, and, reluctantly, William Pilbrow, to join him in the Bar-Parlor and had arranged with the landlord that nobody else would be admitted. The Public Bar, as a result, drove a roaring trade.

When they had all been served and the hatch closed, Alleyn walked into the middle of the room and raised his hand. It was the slightest of gestures but it secured their attention.

He said, "I think you must all realize that we are not satisfied this was an accident. The evidence against accident has been collected piecemeal from the persons in this room and I am going to put it before you. If I go wrong I want you to correct me. I ask you to do this with absolute frankness, even if you are obliged to implicate someone who you would say was the last person in the world to be capable of a crime of violence."

He waited. Pilbrow, who had come very close, had his ear cupped in his hand. The rector looked vaguely horrified. Richard De'ath suddenly gulped down his double whiskey. Miss Hart coughed over her lemonade and Mrs. Simpson avidly popped a peppermint cream in her mouth and took a swig of her port-and-raspberry.

Alleyn nodded to Fox who laid Mr. Bates's Bible, open at the flyleaf, on the table before him.

"The case," Alleyn said, "hinges on this book. You have

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all seen the entries. I remind you of the recorded deaths in 1779 of the three Hadets—Stewart Shakespeare, Naomi Balbus, and Peter Rook. To each of these is attached a biblical text suggesting that they met their death by violence. There have never been any Hadets in this village and the days of the week are wrong for the given dates. They are right, however, for the year 1921 and *they fit the deaths*, all by falling from a height, of William Wagstaff, Ruth Wall, and Simon Castle.

"By analogy the Christian names agree. William suggests Shakespeare. Naomi—Ruth; Balbus—a wall. Simon—Peter; and a Rook is a Castle in chess. And Hadet," Alleyn said without emphasis, "is an anagram of Death."

"Balderdash!" Miss Hart cried out in an unrecognizable voice.

"No, it's not," said Mrs. Simpson. "It's jolly good crossword stuff."

"Wicked balderdash. Richard!"

De'ath said, "Be quiet. Let him go on."

"We believe," Alleyn said, "that these three people met their deaths by one hand. Motive is a secondary consideration, but it is present in several instances, predominantly in one. Who had cause to wish the death of these three people? Someone whom old Wagstaff had bullied and to whom he had left his money and who killed him for it. Someone who was infatuated with Simon Castle and bitterly jealous of Ruth Wall. Someone who hoped, as an heiress, to win Castle for herself and who, failing, was determined nobody else should have him. Wagstaff's orphaned niece—Fanny Wagstaff."

There were cries of relief from all but one of his hearers. He went on. "Fanny Wagstaff sold everything, disappeared, and was never heard of again in the village. But twenty-four years later she returned, and has remained here ever since."

A glass crashed to the floor and a chair overturned as the vast bulk of the postmistress rose to confront him.

"Lies! *Lies!*" screamed Mrs. Simpson.

"Did you sell everything again, before leaving New Zealand?" he asked as Fox moved forward. "Including the Bible, Miss Wagstaff?"

"But," Troy said, "how could you be so sure?"

"She was the only one who could leave her place in the church unobserved. She was the only one fat enough to rub her

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hips against the narrow door jambs. She uses an indelible pencil. We presume she arranged to meet Bates on the balcony, giving a cock-and-bull promise to tell him something nobody else knew about the Hadets. She indicated the text with her pencil, gave the Bible a shove, and as he leaned out to grab it, tipped him over the edge.

"In talking about 1921 she forgot herself and described the events as if she had been there. She called Bates a typical New Zealander but gave herself out to be a Londoner. She said whitebait are only a quarter of the size of sprats. New Zealand whitebait are—English whitebait are about the same size.

"And as we've now discovered, she didn't send my cables. Of course she thought poor little Bates was hot on her tracks, especially when she learned that he'd come here to see me. She's got the kind of crossword-puzzle mind that would think up the biblical clues, and would get no end of a kick in writing them in. She's overwhelmingly conceited and vindictive."

"Still—"

"I know. Not good enough if we'd played the waiting game. But good enough to try shock tactics. We caught her off her guard and she cracked up."

"Not," Mr. Fox said, "a nice type of woman."

Alleyn strolled to the gate and looked up the lane to the church. The spire shone golden in the evening sun.

"The rector," Alleyn said, "tells me he's going to do something about the balcony."

"Mrs. Simpson, née Wagstaff," Fox remarked, "suggested wire netting."

"And she ought to know," Alleyn said and turned back to the cottage.

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introducing a *NEW* character --

meet Major Henry T. McDonlevy, con man

by ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

Is there a resurgence, a roguish revival, a renaissance, of con-man stories? We hope so: con-man stories, which have a noble and notable tradition in the history of the genre, are always fascinating reading—especially when they are as clever as this first recorded caper of Major Henry T. McDonlevy. (Are we fascinated because we secretly love to see others fleeced?)

"Bread Upon the Waters" is destined, we are sure, to be the first chuckle in a honeysuckle of a new series . . .

BREAD UPON THE WATERS

by ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

The first time I met the Major I was in jail, serving out a $100 fine for disturbing the peace at the time-honored rate of $1 a day. I understand inflation has played havoc with that as it has with all things these days, and the judges now trade the time you have for the money you haven't at the rate of $3 or even $4 a day. But be that as it may, it was $1 a day then. And by my reckoning I still had 72 days to go when the turnkey lumbered down the corridor, unlocked my cell, and jerked his thumb up to motion me to my feet.

"Vacation's over," he said. "It's back to the cold cruel world for you."

"Now?" I said. "Just when the chef is learning to make hash the way I like it?"

The turnkey gave me a sour look. "You want to lay there and crack wise," he said, "or do you want to get out?"

I really didn't have to give that much thought. "I want to get out," I said.

I was curious, though, and at the entrance to the cell block I asked the bored clerk who passed over the envelope containing my meager personal

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possessions, "How come I'm being sprung?"

"Ask the man at the front desk," he said without looking up.

Which I did. "Your fine's been paid," he said. "By your friend over there," he added, nodding his head to indicate a short barrel-chested man with a square ruddy face, full gray mustache, and close-cropped hair of the same gray color. The man was standing near the door.

His face lit up as soon as he caught me looking at him curiously, and he advanced with his hand outstretched to grasp mine. "Ah, James," he said. "Thought I recognized you from your picture. Sorry not to have got here sooner, but I only just learned your whereabouts this morning. Still, better late than never, eh?"

"If you say so," I said, "although—"

"I have the advantage of you, eh? Of course. But let me rectify that." He drew himself to his full five-foot-five and thrust out his chest even farther. "Major Henry T. McDonlevy, late U.S. Army. And the world's greatest adjutant until some bureaucratic mixup got me passed over for promotion and forced my retirement. Still," he added cheerfully, "the Army's loss is your gain. Because if I hadn't retired I wouldn't have been your fellow lodger at Mrs. Peters' and therefore wouldn't have heard about your plight."

"Yes," I said, "that's all very interesting. But—"

"But you don't want to hang around a jailhouse discussing it. Of course not." He took my arm and guided me out through the double doors. "On a beautiful day like this," he went on, "a young man—and even an old one—can find better things to do."

I let him take me a couple of steps down the street. Then I carefully disengaged my arm. "I don't want to appear ungrateful," I said, "but I can't help wondering just why you'd plunk down $100 for a total stranger, fellow lodger or not."

The Major's face sobered and he nodded thoughtfully. "Yes," he said, "I suppose it does seem a little odd. But," he continued, taking my arm again and pulling me with him down the street, "you see, my boy, I try to guide my life by the Good Book."

"You mean 'Do unto others' and that sort of thing?" I asked.

"No," the Major said, dragging the word out. "As a matter of fact, I had a different text in mind. Ecclesiastes ten, twenty: 'Cast thy bread upon the waters.' "

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"Now," I said, "I do see. But if you're looking for a thousandfold return from me, I'm afraid you're in for a disappointment. If I had any money, Major, or any prospects of getting any, I'd have paid that fine myself."

"I think you'll find the exact text is 'for thou shalt find it after many days,' " the Major said unperturbed. "Although I must admit most people would have it your way and I myself have found that my investments generally result in a tidy profit.

"As for your prospects. Well" — he coughed delicately into his cupped hand—"I'm afraid I overstated the case somewhat when I said we were fellow lodgers. Actually, I rented your room after you—ah—vacated it. Apparently, however, the postman wasn't aware of the change and this morning he delivered this."

He took an envelope from his breast pocket and handed it to me. "I'm afraid I opened it—inadvertently, of course, before I noticed the name of the addressee."

"Of course," I said drily, opening the letter. It was three months old, having kicked around a bit before catching up with me, and it was clearly addressed to Thomas James.

"Dear Mr. James (it read), I regret to inform you that your great-uncle Arthur Wallace passed away on the 15th of last month, naming you his sole heir. If you will call at my office with proper proof of identity I will arrange transfer to you of his estate, said estate consisting of 750 acres in the heart of Michigan's vacation-land."

It was signed Byron Swope, Administrator of the Estate of Arthur Wallace, Appleby, Michigan.

I glanced up from reading and as my eyes met the Major's he smiled brightly. "I took the liberty of doing a little research on your behalf," he said. "And the area *is* booming, summer cottages being a big thing right at the moment."

I refolded the letter and stuck it in my pocket. "All right, Major," I said. "Fair's fair. I'll see you get your money back plus a reasonable profit."

"Fine," the Major said. He puffed out his chest and strutted along beside me. "We can discuss what constitutes 'reasonable' later, after the extent of my services has been determined. For now, though, let's concentrate on getting you to Michigan. And since one should never undertake a journey of that magnitude alone, I'll just trot along—if you don't mind."

Actually, whether I minded

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was something of a moot question. If I was going to get to Michigan at all, somebody was going to have to pay for the trip. And the Major was as good a prospect as any.

I'd never been to Appleby, Michigan, but I had a pretty good idea of what the town was like from my mother's description of her childhood—a wide spot on the road somewhere between Tawas and Traverse City. As far as I could tell from my admittedly limited knowledge, about the only thing that had been added since her day was a sign at the edge of town proclaiming it "The Heart of Michigan's Vacationland."

I remarked as much to the Major as we drove past in the car we'd rented when we'd found that the only public transportation north from Saginaw was a bus.

"Tush, tush, my boy," he said. "Nobody's asking you to live here. We simply realize our profit and move on to greener pastures, as agreed."

"And the sooner the better," I said, surveying the weathering storefronts that made up Main Street. The area might be booming as the Major had said, but the town certainly wasn't being ostentatious about it.

Swope's office turned out to be a narrow book-and-paper-cluttered cubicle on the second floor above the town's only restaurant. And Swope himself was a tall spare individual in his mid to late sixties with small glittering eyes in a long narrow face and a tight, almost lipless mouth.

"Well," he said, as the Major and I presented ourselves, "this *is* something of a surprise. After all these months I'd just about decided you didn't intend to claim your inheritance."

That should have alerted me. What I mean is, people just don't *not* claim inheritances. Unless, of course, there's some reason not to. But to tell the truth, in the last several days I'd sort of got used to letting the Major make the decisions. So I just stood there and let him take charge now.

"No mystery," he said bluffly. "The lad had simply moved and I didn't manage to track him down with the news until just recently."

Swope favored the Major with a long cool glance, then turned back to me. "I suppose you've brought your birth certificate," he said.

"I did," I said and passed it over.

Swope examined it briefly, then nodded. "Seems to be in order," he said. "Now, all we have to do is transfer the land formally to you. Let's see now.

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I've got one of those forms around here somewhere." He rummaged through his desk and the cabinets surrounding it, finally coming up with a legal-sized document which he began to fill in with a ballpoint pen, the only modern touch as far as I could see in the entire office.

"I should warn you, though," Swope said, "that this is going to cost you some money."

"I knew it," I said. I took hold of the Major's arm. "Come on, Major, Let's go."

But McDonlevy held back. "Not so fast," he said. "First let's find out how much."

"Well," Swope said, scratching behind his ear with the click button end of the ballpoint, "as I recollect, the taxes are paid through the end of this year, and there was enough in Arthur's bank account to cover my fee as administrator." His face brightened. "So all you have to pay is the standard recorder's fee of $20."

"Well," the Major said heartily, "I think we can afford that." He took two $10 bills from his wallet. "I assume we pay this to you," he said to Swope.

"That's right," Swope said, deftly lifting the bills from the Major's hand and stuffing them into his own pocket. "Among other things I'm deputy clerk of the court here and the recorder."

Swope set about finishing filling in the form, stamped it with an official-looking seal, and handed it to the Major who passed it on to me. I looked at it briefly, then folded it and put it in my coat pocket.

"Now that that's out of the way," the Major said, "my young friend and I would like to see the property. You can tell us how to find it, I assume."

"Sure," Swope said. "It's about five miles northeast of town. You can't miss it. It's the only slue land anywhere close by."

The Major looked blank. "I don't think I'm familiar with the term," he said. "Slue land?"

"I am," I said. I looked hard at Swope. "Do you mean to tell me that what I've traveled so far to inherit is nothing but a swamp?"

"Well," Swope said, "'swamp' is probably too strong a word. But it is wet. Except in the winter, of course, when it freezes."

"Sure, though, man," the Major said, "it must be worth something?"

"It would be," Swope admitted, "if you could find a buyer. Which isn't too likely, I'm afraid, unless you can figure

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out how to drain it. About eight, ten years ago Arthur had some engineers up from Bay City. They said it wasn't 'feasible.' That means you can do it, but it'd cost more than the land's worth."

"I know what it means," I said. "Tell me, though, if the land's so worthless why did you bother to write me in the first place?"

"Had to," Swope said. "The law says the heir has to be notified." He smiled tightly. "I suppose I could have told you before you paid the transfer fee. But to tell the truth it never occurred to me."

"I'll bet," I said and left, followed by the Major.

"Sorry," I said to him outside, "but it looks as if you cast your bread on the wrong waters this time."

"Perhaps," he said. "But if I may mix metaphors—no battle's lost until the last shot's been fired."

"And just what shots do you plan to fire in this particular battle?"

"Who knows?" he said cheerfully. "But surely it wouldn't hurt to spend one night in the hostelry here, would it?"

I agreed it probably wouldn't. But I wasn't so sure when I saw the room they gave me. Still, I'd learned in jail that you can sleep anywhere and on anything when you're tired enough. And that's just what I was preparing to do—sleep—when the Major popped in. "Come, come, my boy," he said, "moping alone is no good. Let's be out where the action is."

"Action?" I said. "In Appleby, Michigan?"

"There's action everywhere, my boy," the Major said. "All it requires is a nose to ferret it out."

The particular action the Major's nose had ferreted out this time was a poker game at—of all places—Swope's bachelor quarters. Besides Swope there were two others present—a frail-looking, much younger man named Forbus who taught English at the local high school and a stolid hulk of a man named Mitchell whom I took to be a farmer.

"Good of you to help us out, Major," Swope said. "The man who usually fills in the fourth chair had to go out of town and we don't like to play three-handed."

"My pleasure," the Major said, settling into the fourth chair.

Swope picked up the deck and began to shuffle. "Seven-card stud all right with everybody?" he said.

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Forbus and Mitchell nodded, and so did the Major after a moment. "I'm more partial to draw," he said. "But when in Rome, you know."

Swope gave the Major another of his long cool looks. "Yes, of course," he said, finished shuffling and began to deal.

Everybody seemed to take it for granted that I was just there to kibbitz. Which was fine with me, because seven-card stud is a game I try to avoid even when I'm flush. On the surface, it's a deceptively simple game. You're dealt two cards face down, then four more face up and another face down in rotation. Best poker hand based on any five cards wins. The kicker is that you bet after *every* card except the first two. In other words, there are five bets (six if there's a raise along the way) to be met on each hand. Compared with regular draw poker, stud is a real plunger's game where you can lose a lot of money in a very short time if you're not careful. Sometimes even if you are.

Partial to the game or not, the Major knew his way around a card table, and it soon became apparent—at least to me—that he and Swope were the only real poker players present. Forbus was the eternal optimist, always hoping for a miracle and consequently always staying with a hand too long. Mitchell, on the other hand, was an out-and-out bluffer who hadn't learned that bluffing works only when it's the exception to the rule.

Poker isn't entirely a game of skill, though. Luck enters into it as it does in everything else, and the other two couldn't help but win a pot now and then. And since both the Major and Swope played especially tight games, dropping out unless the third or fourth card showed strength, that wasn't as infrequent as you might expect.

So it began to look like the Major's "action" was just what it appeared to be on the surface—a friendly, not too exciting game in which not enough money was going to change hands to make or break anybody. Until 11:30, that is.

At 11:30 Forbus glanced nervously up at the clock on the mantlepiece as he passed his cards back to the dealer—Swope again—at the end of a hand. "Half an hour to go," he said.

"So it is," Swope said mildly. "We always make it a rule," he explained to the Major as he shuffled and reshuffled the cards, "to quit exactly at twelve. Saves argument and embarrassment. But," he added, "for that last half hour we pull out all the stops and play no

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limit. We find it makes a more interesting evening."

"I'm sure it does," the Major murmured. He straightened in his chair and put his hands flat on the table before him.

Something flickered momentarily behind Swope's eyes. Then he finished shuffling and began to deal the cards. The Major's first face-up card was an ace. Swope showed a king, Forbus a three, and Mitchell an eight. "Your bet, Major," Swope said.

The Major sat quietly for a moment, his fingers toying with a stack of white chips. "When a man says 'no limit'," he said at last, "I have to assume he means just that." He pushed the stack of chips forward into the pot. "Fifty dollars," he said.

That was exactly twenty-five times the highest bet made up to that moment, and it effectively served to separate the men from the boys. Forbus and Mitchell pushed their hands in and for all practical purposes joined the kibbitzers' circle, leaving the game to the Major and Swope.

With only two hands to deal, the game went faster than before. And by the time the large and small hands on the clock met at twelve, the Major owed Swope slightly over $900.

"I assume you'll accept my check," the Major said, reaching inside his jacket for his check book.

Swope's eyes went bleaker than usual.

"And," the Major added, "give me a chance to win it back before I leave town."

Swope's eyes brightened. "Planning on staying around for a while, are you, Major?" he said. "In that case, I'll be glad to take your check *and* honor your request."

He accepted the check the Major dashed off and, holding it loosely in his hand, walked with us to the door. "Same time tomorrow night then?" he said.

"Looking forward to it," the Major said.

I waited until we were about half a block away from the house. Then I said, "Operating on the assumption that that check is going to bounce back faster than a tennis ball, I suggest we just keep on going and not even bother stopping at the hotel. That Swope looks like a mean enemy and this is his town, not ours."

"Nonsense, my boy," the Major said. "All I did tonight was cast a little more bread on the waters and it would be foolish to leave before we found it again. But if it bothers you, reflect on this: it will be Monday morning—two days from now—before friend Swope can present that check at any

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bank and several days more before it clears to the bank it's drawn on. Surely that should give us ample grace period to do what we have to do and leave—even if, as you assume, the check is no good."

"Well, maybe," I admitted.

The Major slapped my shoulder heartily. "Of course it does," he said.

"Now have a good sleep. Things will look better in the morning."

Actually, they looked worse. Because when I stopped by the Major's room on my way to breakfast, he was gone and his bed hadn't been slept in.

It took about a minute for the realization to sink in. Then I spent another minute swearing silently at him before settling down to figure out what to do. Instinct told me to cut out, too. Because even if technically only the Major stood to fall on the bad-check charge, small town justice has the regrettable tendency to overlook technicalities and settle for the bird in hand. And if they wanted a peg to hang a case on, there was the small matter of a hotel bill I couldn't pay.

Unfortunately, getting out of town wasn't going to be that easy. The Major had taken the car and hitchhiking meant at least a ten-mile walk down to the main highway since rural drivers are understandably skittish about picking up strangers in city clothes.

Of course, there are worse things than walking ten miles, and going to jail is one of them. But I felt I still had some grace period left. And when some unobtrusive checking around revealed that there was a bus at four that afternoon I opted for it, figuring I could slip on board just before it pulled out and be on my way before anybody realized what had happened.

What I failed to take into account, though, was just how fast and efficiently news spreads in small towns. Swope and Mitchell cornered me a half hour before the bus was due to leave. Mitchell had changed into his working clothes. And despite his farmerish appearance and willingness to break the laws against gambling, it turned out he was a deputy sheriff.

"Haven't seen much of your friend, the Major, today," Swope said conversationally.

"As a matter of fact," Mitchell put in more bluntly, "we haven't seen him at all."

"I'm not surprised," I said. "He said he was tired and was going to stick pretty close to his room."

"Now that's strange," Swope said, "because he isn't there

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now. And the chambermaid told the desk clerk the room looked as if not a thing had been touched."

"Well," I said, searching for something to say, "you know how it is with these military types. They spend so much time getting ready for inspection they forget how not to be neat."

"Perhaps," Swope said. "But his—shall we say, unavailability—does raise some questions. Particularly since I had our local banker call a banker friend of his in Detroit and neither one of them had ever heard of the bank your friend's check is drawn on."

"Now, look," I said. "That check is a matter strictly between you and the Major."

"It certainly is," a familiar clipped voice said, bringing all heads swiveling around.

The Major glowered from the doorway, hands locked behind his back and his barrel chest thrust out. "What's this all about, Swope?" he said.

"Just a little misunderstanding, Major," Swope said coolly.

"Hmph," the Major sniffed. "It seems to me that gentlemen don't misunderstand each other this way."

"Perhaps not," Swope agreed. "But then how would either of us know?" He moved to the door, followed by Mitchell. "Same time tonight?"

"Of course," the Major said stiffly, stepping aside to let them pass. "Cheeky buzzards," he added in a mild, almost disinterested voice after they had disappeared down the hall.

"Maybe I'm one, too," I said. "Because I sure would like to know where you disappeared to today."

The Major's face brightened into a smile. "Just following the Good Book again, my boy," he said. "And now if you'll excuse me I'd better get some rest if I'm to be at my best tonight."

The same players as before were waiting for us at Swope's house that evening. No one made any reference to the events of that afternoon. But, whether for effect or not, Mitchell had left on his deputy sheriff's uniform. The only thing lacking was for him to place his gun meaningfully on the table beside his cards.

"Seven-card stud still all right, Major?" Swope said as the Major took his seat.

"It's your game," the Major said. "I do have one suggestion, though. Since I'm the big loser, how about giving me a chance to catch up by extending the no-limit period to—oh—an hour or two? Or even," he added a shade too casually, "to the whole game?"

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Forbus and Mitchell both looked at Swope, who let the moment drag out before shaking his head. "No," he said. "A rule's a rule. And as you said yourself, 'When in Rome—' "

"Do as the Romans," the Major finished. "Of course."

But it was apparent from the way he fidgeted in his seat and slapped his cards down that he was straining at the leash, impatient for the real game to begin. It wasn't long before Forbus began to fidget, too, and even Mitchell began to show signs of nervousness. Only Swope appeared unaffected, accepting his cards and playing them as unperturbedly as ever.

As for myself—well, I'd thought time had passed slowly in jail. But those days were sprints compared with tonight. And it was with a real sense of relief that I heard Swope announce: "Well, Major, half an hour to go. Now's your chance to get even—if you can."

As before, the game narrowed down immediately to Swope and the Major, and the cards and chips passed back and forth between them with such rapidity that it was impossible to keep track of who was winning. Still, when the dust settled at midnight, the Major was ahead.

"$800, I make it," he said, tallying his chips.

"So do I," Swope said equably, "and since you said you wanted a chance to win your check back, I saved it for you." He reached in his pocket and threw the now folded and crumpled check on the table between them. "I'll take my change in cash if you don't mind," he said. "$125, *I* make that."

He permitted himself a sly smile, and Forbus and Mitchell both grinned openly. The Major looked at them blankly for a moment. Then he smiled, although a bit wryly. "I have to hand it to you, Swope," he said. "You're a hard man to get the better of."

"I try to be," Swope said drily. He flicked his thumb rapidly over his fingers. "Now I'll take my money, please."

"Of course," the Major said. He counted $125 out of his wallet, passed it over to Swope, then picked up the deck of cards and regarded it with the wry expression still on his face. "Perhaps from now on I should stick to parlor tricks." He grinned suddenly, fanned the deck, and offered it to Swope. "Go ahead," he said. "Pick a card."

Swope hesitated, then selected a card, showed it to Forbus, Mitchell and me, and put it back in the deck for the Major. The Major cut and recut

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swiftly, then began dealing cards, laying them out in neat rows. When he'd got about halfway through the deck, he stopped, his thumb just flicking up the edge of the top remaining card. "One last fling, Swope," he said. "My next half-year's income against your next half-year's fees of office that the next card I turn over is yours."

I started to open my mouth, because Swope's card—the four of Spades—lay about a third of the way back in the rows of cards already face up! But a heavy look from Mitchell killed whatever I had planned to say.

Swope's face was as impassive as ever. "You have a bet," he said.

Smiling faintly, the Major reached out and turned the four of Spades face down!

There was a moment of silence. Then Mitchell guffawed and slapped Swope hard across the shoulders. "By God, Byron, he took you that time," he said.

"So he did," Swope said mildly. His eyes came up to the Major's. "That was clever," he said. "Deliberately going past the card you knew was mine. It lured me into overlooking the first rule of gambling—never bet on another man's game.

"Still, maybe you haven't won as much as you thought. I make my living from law and real estate. I only took that job as deputy clerk and recorder for the political weight it carries. That $20 I got from you was the first fee I've collected in six months and the last I'm likely to collect in as many—unless, of course, you manage to find someone foolish enough to buy that worthless land your friend James inherited, in which case you'll be more than welcome to the $20 that sale will bring. And with that he laughed nastily. So did Forbus and Mitchell. They were still laughing when the Major and I let ourselves out.

"Satisfied now, Major?" I said after the door had closed behind us.

"Very much so," he said.

"Then let's get out of this town while we still have money to buy gas."

"Nonsense, my boy," the Major said. "It would be foolish to leave now when we're just about to find again the bread we've cast upon the waters." He took my arm and marched me along beside him. "Old Swope was right about one thing," he said. "You *can't* sell that land of yours. But you *can* give it away. Which, as your agent, is just what I proceeded to arrange for this afternoon.

"First thing Monday morning a reliable direct-mail firm in Detroit will begin releasing letters notifying the lucky

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3000—selected at random from the telephone directories maintained at the excellent public library there—that they have each won a quarter of acre of land 'in the heart of Michigan's vacationland.' All that's required to confirm the prize is that the lucky winner record the deed and pay the standard $20 fee before the end of the month.

"Naturally, I wouldn't expect too many to be able to come up and do that in person. So a convenient return envelope will be enclosed. And all we have to do as the letters come in is simply extract the money and pass the work on to Swope." He smiled benignly. "If experience is any guide, we can expect about fifty percent to respond, giving us a gross of $20 times 1500, or $30,000. Which isn't a bad return at all."

"Q"

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a *NEW* Black Widowers story

by ISAAC ASIMOV

The Black Widowers Club has its origin in a real-life "secret society" of which Isaac Asimov is a member. The real-life club is called the Trap Door Spiders and is, to say the least, an unorthodox organization. For example: there are no officers, elected or appointed; thus no individual is empowered to make any official decision on behalf of the membership. Mr. Asimov describes the club as "an anarchy."

As a group, the Trap Door Spiders has been in existence for nearly thirty years. It is strictly stag, and legend has it that the club was started to give one of its charter members refuge, sanctuary, a place to avoid his wife. Meetings are held once a month, except during the summer, with two volunteers acting as co-hosts and defraying all expenses. Each co-host has the privilege of inviting a guest, who is grilled after dinner. The nature of the grilling has never been divulged to "outsiders." The monthly meeting place is usually the 68 Restaurant on Fifth Avenue and 13th Street, in New York City.

Although there are no formal "rules and regulations" or "bylaws," tradition insists that every member be addressed as "Doctor" and that every member agrees to have his membership in the TDS mentioned in his obituary.

Meetings are held on Friday nights. Preprandial drinks and talk, in separate groups or in general, last from 6:30 to 7:30. The average attendance is about a dozen people. The grilling begins with coffee and ends at 10:30. The only hint to the tenor of the grilling is Mr. Asimov's cryptic and ominous phrase, "no holds barred."

"It is important," Mr. Asimov warns, "to emphasize the differences between the Trap Door Spiders and the Black Widowers." In real life the members of the TDS do not attempt to solve mysteries; meetings are not held invariably in the same place; and there is no waiter who plays a significant role. Henry, the waiter-detective in the Black Widowers stories,

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is Mr. Asimov's "sole creation and has no analog in reality."

The Trap Door Spiders includes in its membership, among others, L. Sprague de Camp, Lin Carter, and Lester del Rey, highly respected writers of science fiction and fantasy; Gilbert Cant of *Time*; George Scithers, a colonel in the army reserve; John Clark, retired chemist who specialized in rocket fuels; and D. R. Bensen, author of EQMM's Criminalimericks, and who is said to be writing the story of the Bible in limericks—which gave Mr. Asimov the idea of having a member of the Black Widowers write the *Iliad* in limericks.

And now we bring you the happening in the fifth meeting of the Black Widowers, with as pretty a puzzle to catch your fancy as you have encountered in any fictional clubroom . . .

THE BIOLOGICAL CLOCK

by ISAAC ASIMOV

Patent attorney Geoffrey Avalon swirled his second drink as he sat down to the table. The drink had not yet diminished to the halfway mark and he would take one more sip before abandoning it. He looked unhappy.

"This is the first time within my memory," he said, "that the Black Widowers have met without a guest." His bushy eyebrows, still black (although his mustache and trim beard had become respectably gray with the years), seemed to twitch.

"Oh, well," said Roger Halsted, the teacher of mathematics, flicking his napkin with an audible slap before placing it over his knees. "As host this session, it's my decision. No appeal. Besides, I have my reasons." Halsted placed the palm of his hand on his high forehead and made a motion as if to brush back hair that had disappeared from the forepart of his pate years before.

"Actually," said writer Emmanuel Rubin, "there's nothing in the bylaws that says we *must* have a guest. The only thing we *must* have is no women."

"The *members* can't be women," said Thomas

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Trumbull, the code expert, glowering out of his perpetually tanned face. "Where does it say that a *guest* can't be a woman?"

"No," said Rubin sharply, his sparse beard quivering. "Every guest is a member *ex officio* for the meal and therefore must abide by all the rules—including not being a woman."

"Exactly what does *ex officio* mean, anyway?" asked artist Mario Gonzalo. "I've always wondered."

But Henry, the official waiter of the club, and the jewel of his tribe, was already presenting the first course, which seemed to be a long roll of pasta, stuffed with spiced cheese, broiled, and covered with sauce.

Halsted took advantage of the break to announce that he had written his limerick for the third book of Homer's *Iliad.*

Trumbull said, "Damn it, Roger, are you going to inflict one of those on us at every meeting?"

"Yes," said Halsted, smiling. "I was planning just that. It keeps me working at it. Besides, you have to have some item of intellectual worth at the dinner. —Say, Henry, don't forget that if it's steak tonight, I want mine rare."

"Trout tonight, Mr. Halsted," said Henry.

"Good," said Halsted. "Now here it is:

"Menelaus, though not very mighty,
Was stronger than Paris, the flighty.
Menelaus did well in
The duel over Helen,
But was foiled by divine Aphrodite."

Gonzalo said, "But what does it mean?"

Avalon explained. "In the third book the Greeks and Trojans decide to settle the matter in a duel between Menelaus and Paris. The latter had eloped with the former's wife, Helen, and that was what caused the war. Menelaus won the duel, but Aphrodite snatched Paris away just in time to save his life. —I'm glad you didn't use Venus in place of Aphrodite, Roger. There's too much use of Roman analogs."

Halsted, through a full mouth, said, "I wanted to avoid the temptation of obvious rhyming."

"Didn't you ever read the *Iliad*, Mario?" asked James Drake, the organic chemist.

"Listen," said Gonzalo, "I'm an artist. I have to save my eyes."

When it was time for dessert, Halsted said, "Okay, let me tell you what I have in mind for tonight. The last four times we've met, some sort of crime

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has come up in every discussion and in the course of that discussion the crime has been solved."

"By Henry," interrupted Drake.

"Yes, by Henry. But what kind of crimes? Drab ones. The first time I wasn't here, but I gather the crime was a robbery, and not much of a robbery at that. The second time, it was worse—a mere case of cheating on an examination."

"That's not such a minor thing," muttered Drake.

"Well, it's not exactly a major thing. The third time—and I was here then—it was theft again, but still drab, mundane. And the fourth time it was a case of espionage of some sort."

"Believe me," said Trumbull, "that wasn't minor."

"Yes," said Halsted in his mild voice, "but there was no real violence in any of them. What we need here, gentlemen, is murder!"

"What do you mean, murder?" asked Rubin.

"I mean that every time we bring a guest, something minor turns up because we take whatever comes. We don't deliberately invite guests who can offer us more interesting crimes. In fact, they're not even supposed to offer us crimes at all. They're just guests."

"So?"

"So there are six of us now present, no guests, and one of us must know of some killing that's still a mystery—"

"You've been reading Agatha Christie," said Rubin. "We'll each tell a puzzling mystery in turn and Miss Marple will solve it for us. —Or Henry will."

Halsted looked embarrassed. "You mean they do things like that—"

Rubin literally threw up his hands.

"Well, you're a writer, so you know," said Halsted. "I don't read murder mysteries."

"That's your loss," said Rubin, "and it shows how *little* you know. You call yourself a mathematician. A proper mystery is as mathematical a puzzle as anything you can prepare and it has to be constructed out of much more intractable material."

"Now wait a minute," said Trumbull. "As long as we're here, why don't we see if we can dig up a murder?"

"Can you present one?" said Halsted hopefully. "You're with the government—working on codes or whatever. You must have been involved with murder, and you don't have to name names. Besides, you know that nothing gets repeated outside these walls."

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"I know that better than you," said Trumbull, "but I don't know about any murders. How about you, Roger? Since you're bringing this up, I suppose you have something up your sleeve. Some mathematical murder?"

"No," said Halsted. "I don't think I can recall ever being involved in murder."

"You don't *think*? You mean there's some doubt in your mind?" asked Avalon.

"No, I'm certain. How about you, Jeff? You're a lawyer."

"Not the kind who gets murderers for clients," Avalon said, with a regretful shake of his head. "Patent complications are my thing. You might ask Henry. He's more at home with crimes than we are—at least, he sounds it."

"I'm sorry, sir," said Henry as he poured the coffee with practised skill. "In my case, it is merely theory. I have been fortunate enough never to be involved with violent death."

"You mean," said Halsted, "that with six of us here—seven, including Henry—we can't scare up a single murder?"

Drake shrugged. "In my game there's always a good chance of death. I haven't witnessed one in the chem lab personally, but there have been poisonings, explosions, even electrocutions. At worst, though, it's murder through negligence."

Trumbull said, "How come you're so quiet, Manny? In all your colorful career you've never had occasion to kill a man?"

"It would sometimes be a pleasure," said Rubin, "like now. But I don't really have to. I can handle anyone who comes along. Listen, I remember—"

But Mario Gonzalo, who had been sitting with his lips clamped together, suddenly said, "I've been involved in a murder."

"Oh? What kind?" asked Halsted.

"My sister," Mario said broodingly. "About three years ago—before I joined the Black Widowers."

"I'm sorry," said Halsted. "I guess you don't want to talk about it."

"I wouldn't mind talking about it," said Mario, shrugging, "but there's really nothing to talk about. No mystery. It's just another one of those things that makes this city the fun place it is to live in. They broke into the apartment, tried to loot it, and killed her."

"Who did?" asked Rubin.

"Who knows? Addicts probably. It happens all the time in that neighborhood. In the apartment house she and her husband lived in, there had

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been four burglaries since New Year's and it was only the end of April when the murder happened."

"Were they all murders?"

"They don't have to be. The smart looter picks a time when the apartment is empty. Or if someone's there, they just scare them or tie them up. Marge was stupid enough to try to resist, to fight back. There were plenty of signs of a struggle." Gonzalo shook his head.

Halsted said, after a painful pause, "Did they ever get the ones who did it?"

Gonzalo's eyes lifted and stared into Halsted's without any attempt at masking the contempt in them. "Do you think they even *looked*? That sort of thing goes on all the time. And nobody even cares. And if they got them, so what? Would it bring Marge back?"

"It might keep them from doing it to others."

"There'd be plenty of other miserable creeps to keep doing it." Gonzalo drew a deep breath, then said, "Well, maybe I'd *better* talk about it and get it out of my system. It's all my fault, you see, because I wake up too early. If it weren't for that, maybe Marge would still be alive and Alex wouldn't be the wreck he is now."

"Who's Alex?" asked Avalon.

"My brother-in-law. He was married to Marge, and I liked him. To be truthful, I think I liked him better than I ever did her. She never approved of me. She thought being an artist was just my way of goofing off. Of course, once I started making a decent living—no, she never really approved of me even then. She liked Alex, though."

"He wasn't an artist?" Avalon was carrying the burden of the questioning and the others seemed willing to leave it to him.

"No. He wasn't much of anything when they married, just a drifter; but afterwards he became exactly what she wanted. She was what he needed to get a little push into him. They needed each other. She had someone to care for—"

"No children?"

"No. Poor Marge. Something biological, so she couldn't have kids. But it didn't matter. Alex was her kid, and he flourished. He got a job the month they were married, got promoted, did well. They were getting to the point where they were planning to move out of that damned deathtrap, and then it happened. Poor Alex. He was as much to blame as I was. More, in fact. Of all days he had to leave the house on that one."

"He wasn't in the apartment, then?"

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"Of course not. If he was, he might have scared them off."

"Or he might have gotten killed himself."

"In which case they would probably have run off and left Marge alive. Believe me, I've listened to him list all the possibilities. No matter how he slices it, she'd still be alive if he hadn't left that day, and it bothers him. And let me tell you, he's gone to pot since it happened. He's just a drifter again. I give him money when I can and he gets odd jobs now and then. —Poor Alex. He had those five years of marriage when he was really making it, when he was a go-getter. Now he has nothing to show for it."

Gonzalo shook his head. "What gets me is that the victim isn't the one who gets the worst of it. It was a senseless murder—hell, all they got was ten, fifteen dollars in small bills. But at least Marge died quickly. The knife was right in the heart. Alex suffers for it every day of his life now, and my mother took it hard."

"Listen," said Halsted, "if you'd rather not talk about—"

"It's all right. —I think of it nights sometimes. If I didn't wake up early that day—"

"That's the second time you said that," said Trumbull. "What's your waking up early got to do with it?"

"Because people who know me count on it. —Look, I always wake up at eight a.m.—it doesn't vary by as much as ten minutes one way or the other. I don't even bother keeping the clock by my bed; it stays in the kitchen. It's got something to do with rhythms in the body."

"The biological clock," muttered Drake. "I wish it worked that way with me. I *hate* getting up in the morning."

"It works with me all the time," said Gonzalo. "Even if I go to sleep late—three or four in the morning—I always wake up at eight. I go back to sleep later in the day if I'm knocked out, but I wake up at eight. Even on Sunday. You'd think I'd sleep late on Sunday, but even then, damn it, I wake up early."

"You mean it happened on a Sunday?" asked Rubin.

Gonzalo nodded. "That's right. I should have been asleep. I should have been the kind of person people would know better than to wake up early Sunday morning—but they don't hesitate. Even on Sunday."

"So what?" said Drake. "You're an artist, so you can make your own hours. Why do you have to get up early in the morning?"

"Well, for one thing, I work best in the morning. Besides, I'm time-conscious. I don't have

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to live by the clock, but I like to know what time it is. I'm never late to the Black Widowers, am I? —That clock. It's trained, you know. After it happened, after Marge was killed, I wasn't home for three days and it just happened to stop either at eight p.m. Sunday or eight a.m. Monday. I don't know which. Anyway, when I came back there it was with the hands pointing to eight as though rubbing it in that eight is my wakeup time."

Gonzalo brooded for a while and no one spoke. Henry passed around the small brandy glasses with no expression on his face, unless you counted the merest tightening of his lips.

Gonzalo finally said, "It's a funny thing but I had a rotten night, the night before, and there was no reason for it. That time of year, end of April, cherry-blossom time, is my favorite time. I'm not exactly a landscape artist but that's the one time I like to get into the park and make sketches. And the weather was good. I remember it was a nice mild Saturday, the first really beautiful weekend of the year, and my work was going pretty well, too.

"I had no reason to feel bad that day, but I got more and more restless. I remember I turned off my little television set just before the eleven o'clock news that night. It was as though I felt I didn't want to hear the news, as though I felt there would be bad news. I *remember* that. I didn't make it up afterwards, and I'm not a mystic. But I had a premonition, I know I did."

Rubin said, "More likely you had a touch of indigestion."

"All right," said Gonzalo, "call it indigestion. All I know it was before eleven p.m. and I went into the kitchen and wound the clock—I always wind it at night—and said to myself, 'I can't go to bed *this* early!' But I did.

"Maybe it was too early, because I couldn't sleep. I kept tossing and worrying—I don't remember about what. What I should have done was get up, do some work or read a book or watch a late movie—but I didn't. I just made up my mind to stay in bed."

"Why?" asked Avalon.

"Don't know. It seemed important at the time. God, how I remember that night, because I kept thinking that maybe I'll sleep late because I'm not sleeping now, and yet I knew I wouldn't. I must have dropped off at about four a.m., but at eight I was up and crawled out of bed to get myself breakfast.

"It was another sunny day.

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Pleasant and cool, but you knew it was going to have all the warmth of spring with none of the heat of summer. —Another nice day! —You know it hurts me, now and then, that I didn't like Marge better. I mean, we got along all right, but we weren't close. I swear I visited them more to be with Alex than to be with her. —And then I got a call."

Halsted said, "You mean a telephone call?"

"Yes. Eight o'clock on Sunday morning. Who would make a call at that time unless they knew the jerk always got up at eight? If I had been asleep and had been awakened, and growled into the mouthpiece, the whole thing would have been different."

"Who was it?" asked Drake.

"Alex. He asked if he woke me. He knew he didn't, but he felt guilty calling me that early, I suppose. He asked what time it was. I looked at the clock and said, 'It's eight-oh-nine. Of course, I'm awake.' " Then he asked if he could come over, because he'd had a fight with Marge and had stamped out of the house and didn't want to go back till she'd cooled down. —I tell you, I'm glad I never married.

"Anyway, if I'd only said no. If I'd only told him I'd had a bad night and needed my sleep and didn't want company, he'd have gone back to his apartment. He had no other place to go. And then it all wouldn't have happened. But no, big-hearted Mario was so proud of being an early riser that he said, 'Come on over and I'll fix you coffee and eggs,' because I knew Marge wasn't one for early Sunday breakfasts, and I was sure Alex hadn't eaten.

"So he was over in ten minutes and by eight thirty I had the scrambled eggs and bacon in front of him, and Marge was alone in the apartment, waiting for murderers."

Trumbull said, "Did your brother-in-law tell your sister where he was going?"

Gonzalo said, "I don't think so—at least, I assumed he didn't. I figure what happened was he stamped out in a rage without even knowing where he was going himself. Then he thought of me. Even if he knew he was going to see me, he might not have told her. He would figure: Let her stew."

"All right," said Trumbull, "and then when the junkies came to the door and maybe tried the lock, she probably figured it was Alex coming back, so she opened the door to them. I'll bet the lock wasn't broken."

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"No, it wasn't," said Gonzalo.

"Isn't Sunday morning an odd time for junkies to make the rounds?" asked Drake.

"Listen," said Rubin, "they'll do it any time. The craving for drugs knows no day or hour."

"What was the fight about?" asked Avalon. "I mean, between Alex and Marge?"

"Oh, I don't know. A little thing, I suppose. Alex may have done something at work that must have looked bad and that was one thing Marge couldn't stand. I don't even know what it was, but whatever it was, it must have been a blow at her pride in him and she was furious.

"The trouble was, Alex never learned to just let her run down. When we were kids I always did that. I would say, 'Yes, Marge; yes, Marge,' and she'd run down. But Alex would always try to defend himself and then things would just get worse. —Of course he says now that if he only hadn't made a Federal case out of it he wouldn't have left, and then none of it would have happened."

" 'The moving finger writes,' " said Avalon. "Brooding on these ifs does no one any good."

"Sure, but how do you stop, Jeff? Anyway, they had a bad night and I had a bad night. It was as though there were some kind of telepathic communication."

"Oh, nonsense," said Rubin.

"We were twins, remember," said Gonzalo defensively.

"Only fraternal twins," said Rubin, "unless you're a girl underneath all those clothes."

"So what?"

"So it's only identical twins who are supposed to have this telepathic sympathy, but that's also nonsense."

"Anyway," said Gonzalo, "Alex was with me and I ate and he didn't eat much, and he cried on my shoulder about how hard Marge was on him sometimes, and I sympathized and said, 'Listen, why do you pay so much attention to her? She's a good kid if you'll only not take her too seriously.' —You know all the consoling things people say. I figured in a couple of hours he'd be talked out and go home and make it up and I'd go out to sketch in the park or maybe go back to bed. Only in a couple of hours the telephone rang again, and it was the police."

"How'd they know where to find Alex?" asked Halsted.

"They didn't. They called *me*. I was her brother. Alex and I went over and identified her. For a while *he* looked like a

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dead man. It wasn't just that his wife was dead. After all, he'd had a fight with her and the neighbors must have heard. Now she was dead, and they always suspect the husband—he's Number One. Of course they questioned him and he admitted the fight and leaving the apartment and coming to my place."

"It must have sounded phony as hell," said Rubin.

"I corroborated the fact that he was at my place. I said he'd arrived at my place at about eight twenty and had been there since. And the murder had taken place at nine."

"You mean there were witnesses?" asked Drake.

"No, but there'd been noise. The people living just below had heard. The people across the hall had heard. Furniture being overturned, screams. Of course no one saw anyone; no one saw anything. They all sat behind their locked doors. But they heard the noise and it was at nine o'clock. They all agreed to that.

"That settled it as far as the police were concerned. In that neighborhood, if it isn't the spouse, it's some petty thief, probably an addict. Alex and I went out and he got drunk and I stayed with him a couple of days because he was in no condition to be left alone, and that's all there is to the story."

Trumbull said, "Do you ever see Alex these days?"

"Once in a while. I lend him a few bucks now and then. Not that I expect to get paid back. He quit his job right after Marge was killed—I don't think he ever went back to work. He was just a broken man—because he blamed himself, you see. Why did he argue with her? Why did he leave the house? Why did he come over to my place? —Anyway, there it is. It's a murder—but there's no mystery."

After a silence Halsted said. "Do you mind, Mario, if we speculate about it, just—just—"

"Just for fun?" said Mario. "Sure, go ahead, have your fun. If you have questions I'll answer as best I can, but as far as the murder is concerned there's nothing more to say."

"You see," said Halsted awkwardly, "no one *saw* anybody. It's only an assumption that some nameless addicts came in and killed her. Someone might have killed her for another reason, knowing that it would probably be blamed on addicts and the real murderer would be safe. For instance, did she have any enemies? Did she have money that somebody wanted?"

"Money? They had just enough to get by. All she had

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was what was in the apartment and in a savings account—five hundred dollars, maybe. It all went to Alex, of course. But the money was his to begin with—it was a joint account."

"How about jealousy?" said Avalon. "Maybe she was having an affair. Or he was. Maybe that's what the fight was about."

"And he killed her?" said Gonzalo. "The fact is, he was in my apartment at the time she was killed."

"Suppose it was her boy friend, or his girl friend. The boy friend, because your sister was threatening to break off the affair. The girl friend, because she wanted to marry your brother-in-law."

Mario shook his head. "Marge was no *femme fatale.* I was always surprised she made it with Alex. For that matter, maybe she didn't."

"Did Alex complain about that?" asked Trumbull.

"No, but then he's no great lover, either. Listen, he's been a widower for three years now and I'd swear he has no girl of any kind. No boy, either, before you start talking about that."

Rubin said, "Hold it, you still don't know what the fight was really about. You said it may have been something that happened at work. Did he actually tell you what it was and you've forgotten? Or did he never tell you?"

"He didn't go into detail, and I didn't ask. I didn't think it was my business."

"All right," said Rubin, "how about this? It was a fight about something big at work. Maybe Alex had stolen fifty thousand dollars and Marge was angry about it, and that was the cause of the fight. Or Marge had made him steal it and he was getting cold feet about it and that was the cause. And maybe the fifty thousand was in the house and someone else knew about it and that someone killed her and took it and Alex doesn't dare mention it because he stole the money."

"What someone?" demanded Gonzalo. "What theft? Alex isn't that kind of guy."

"Famous last words," intoned Drake.

"Well, he isn't. And if he had done something like that, the firm he worked for wouldn't have kept quiet. No way."

Trumbull said, "How about the kind of infighting that goes on in apartment houses. You know, feuds between tenants. Was there someone who hated her and finally let her have it?"

"Hell, if there were anything that serious I'd know about it. Marge never kept things like

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that from me."

Drake said, "Could it have been suicide? After all, her husband had just walked out on her. Maybe he said he was never coming back and she was in despair. In a fit of depression she killed herself."

"True, it was a knife from the kitchen," said Gonzalo. "But Marge wasn't the suicidal type. She might have killed someone else, but not herself. Besides why would there be that struggle and the screams if she had killed herself?"

Drake said, "In the first place, things might have been knocked about during her argument with Alex. In the second place, she might have faked a murder to get her husband into trouble. Vengeance is mine, saith the aggrieved wife."

"Oh, come on," said Gonzalo. "Marge wouldn't do that in a million years."

"You know," said Drake, "you don't really know that much about another person, even if she is a twin."

"Well, you won't get me to believe it."

Trumbull said, "I don't know why we're wasting our time. Why don't we ask the expert. —Henry?"

Henry, whose face mirrored only polite interest, said, "Yes, Mr. Trumbull?"

"How about telling us all about it? Who killed Mr. Gonzalo's sister?"

Henry's eyebrows lifted slightly. "I do not represent myself to be an expert, Mr. Trumbull, but I must say that all the suggestions made by the gentlemen at the table, including yours, are unlikely in the extreme. I myself think that the police are perfectly correct and that if, in this case, the husband did not do it, then housebreakers probably did. And these days one must assume that those housebreakers were drug addicts desperate for money or for something they could convert into money."

"You disappoint me, Henry," said Trumbull.

Henry smiled gently.

"Well, then," said Halsted, "I guess we'd better adjourn after we settle who hosts the next meeting, and I suppose we'd better go back to having a guest. This idea of mine didn't work out so well."

"Sorry I couldn't make it better, folks," said Gonzalo.

"I didn't mean it that way, Mario," said Halsted hastily.

"I know. —Well, let's forget it."

They were leaving, with Mario Gonzalo bringing up the rear. A light tap on his shoulder made Gonzalo turn.

Henry said, "Mr. Gonzalo,

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could I see you privately, without the others knowing? It's quite important."

Gonzalo stared a moment, then said, "Okay, I'll go out, say my goodbyes, take a taxi, and have it bring me back."

He was back in ten minutes.

"Is this something about my sister, Henry?"

"I'm afraid so, sir. I thought I had better talk to you alone."

"All right. Let's go back into the private dining room."

"Better not, sir. According to the rules, anything said in that room can't be repeated outside and I do not wish to talk in confidence. I don't mind not being able to talk about run-of-the-mill misdeeds, but murder is another thing altogether. Here's a corner we can use."

They sat down in the corner. It was late and the restaurant was virtually empty.

Henry said in a low voice, "I listened to the account and I would like your permission to repeat some of it just to make sure I have it right."

"Sure, go ahead."

"As I understand it, on a Saturday toward the end of April you felt uneasy and went to bed before the eleven o'clock news."

"Yes, just before eleven."

"And you didn't hear the news."

"Not even the opening headlines."

"And that night, even though you didn't sleep, you didn't get out of bed. You didn't go to the bathroom or the kitchen."

"No, I didn't."

"And then you woke up at the same time you always do?"

"That's right."

"Well, now, Mr. Gonzalo, that is what disturbs me. A person who wakes up every morning at the same time, thanks to some sort of biological clock inside him, wakes up at the wrong time twice a year."

"What?"

"Twice a year, sir, in this state, ordinary clocks are shifted, once when Daylight Saving Time starts, and once when it ends. But biological time doesn't change. Mr. Gonzalo, Daylight Saving Time starts on the last Sunday in April. At one a.m. Sunday morning the clocks are advanced to two a.m. If you had listened to the eleven o'clock news you would have been reminded to do that. But you wound your clock before eleven p.m. and you said nothing about adjusting it. Then you went to bed and never touched the clock during the night. When you woke at eight a.m., the clock should

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have said *nine* a.m. Am I right?"

"Good Lord," said Gonzalo.

"You left after the police called and you didn't return for days When you came back the clock had stopped, of course. You had no way of knowing it was an hour slow when it stopped. You then set it to the correct time and never knew the difference."

"I never thought of that, but you're perfectly right."

"The police should have thought of that, but it's so easy these days to dismiss run-of-the-mill crimes of violence as the work of drug addicts. You gave your brother-in-law his alibi and they followed the line of least resistance."

"You mean he—Alex—"

"It's possible, sir. They fought and he killed her at nine a.m., just as the statements of the neighbors indicated. I doubt that it was premeditated. Then, in desperation, he thought of you—and rather clever of him it was. He called you and asked you what time it was. You said eight-oh-nine, so he knew you hadn't changed your clock and rushed over to your place. If you had said *nine*-oh-nine, he would probably have tried to get out of town."

"But, Henry, why should he have done it?"

"It's hard to tell with married couples, sir. Your sister may have had too-high standards. You said she disapproved of your way of life, for instance, and probably made that very plain—plain enough to cause you not to like her very much. Now she certainly disapproved of her husband's way of life before she married him—he was a drifter, you said. She made of him a respectable, hardworking employee and he may not have liked it. After he finally exploded and killed her, he became a drifter again. You think this was because of despair; it might have been out of relief."

"Well— What do we do?"

"I don't know, sir. It would be a hard thing to prove. Could you really remember, after years, that you didn't change the clock? A cross-examining attorney would tear you apart on the witness stand. On the other hand, your brother-in-law might break down if faced with it. You'll have to consider whether you wish to go to the police, sir."

"I?" said Gonzalo hesitantly.

"It was your sister, sir," said Henry softly.

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something decidedly different

a *NEW* feature article by

JOHN DICKSON CARR

As you know, we rarely publish nonfiction—less often, on the average, than once a year. But when we do give you a nonfiction piece, we break our editorial rule only to give you something special, something different . . .

Here is such an unusual feature article—about "those polished aristocrats of roguedom, the English highwaymen of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries." Actually, this "rodeo of villainy" was meant to be the first of a series of (in the author's own words) "labors of love"—to be followed by "discussions of pirates, murderers, housebreakers, roaring girls, and other wearers of the motley." Let's hope that John Dickson Carr realizes his original plan and completes the series for readers of EQMM.

Now, to the dirty work at the crossroads, the escapades of the early swashbucklers on the high toby—the precursors of today's hijackers and contemporary skyjackers. So—"Your money or your life!" . . .

STAND AND DELIVER!
(Part One)

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

The title page of my own five-volume edition impressively reads: *The Complete Newgate Calendar*, being: *Captain Charles Johnson's* General History of the Lives and Adventures of the Most Famous Highwaymen, Murderers, Street-Robbers, and Account of the Voyages and Plunders of the Most Notorious Pyrates, 1734; *Captain Alexander Smith's* Compleat History of the

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Lives and Robberies of the Most Notorious Highwaymen, Foot-Pads, Shop-Lifts and Cheats, 1719; The Tyburn Chronicle, 1768; The Malefactor's Register, 1796; *George Borrow's* Celebrated Trials, 1825; The Newgate Calendar, by *Andrew Knapp and William Baldwin*, 1826; *Camden Pelham's* Chronicles of Crime, 1841, etc., collated and edited with some appendices by J. L. Rayner and G. T. Crook (London: privately printed for the Navarre Society Limited, 23 New Oxford Street, W.C. 1, MCMXXVI).

Frequently I dip into it; here is dirty work in plenty. Beginning with Thomas Dun, the probably mythical monster who led a lunatic band of robbers in Bedfordshire during the reign of King Henry the First (1100-1135), this rodeo of villainy comes whooping down the centuries to James Inglett, a venerable "cow-leech" or vet 94 years old, who carelessly administered arsenic to a young girl among his patients at the full tide of Victorianism in 1841.

One great charm of the earliest compilers, Captains Smith and Johnson in the Eighteenth Century, is their delightful gullibility. They will swallow any tale and relate any anecdote, from the merely far-fetched to the outrageous, provided it makes a good story. So far as entertainment goes, who cares? At the same time, if we are to study these cases as fact, we must apply the test of historical research no less than the test of common sense. There are many classifications: murderers, housebreakers, roaring girls who combined prostitution with thievery. And we can do worse than begin with those polished aristocrats of roguedom, the highwaymen of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.

He was one hell of a fellow, this highwayman, idol of small boys and darling of the ladies. They liked to think of him as a gentleman; usually, whatever his background, he affected the airs and dress of one. His brutality they accepted with tolerance; it was a brutal age. Modern verses give us a picture of the highwayman for the delight of romantic people.

He'd a French cocked hat on his forehead, a bunch of lace at his chin,
A coat of the claret velvet, and breeches of brown doeskin:
They fitted with never a wrinkle; his boots were up to the thigh,

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And he rode with a jewelled twinkle,
His pistol butts a-twinkle,
His rapier hilt a-twinkle, under the jewelled sky.

That costume suggests middle Eighteenth Century, when the huge periwigs of Stuart times had dwindled into more manageable hairpieces under the first two Georges. Though the most fashionable highwayman is unlikely to have worn jewelled sword or pistols, pistols he assuredly did carry: two in saddle holsters, with four to six more stuck through his belt. On the roads and heaths round London, his career was generally a short one. He trusted a friend or a mistress who betrayed him; he got drunk and betrayed himself; he took on odds too heavy and was brought down after firing his last pistol.

Followed trial, sentence, the few sweet days of lording it among admirers at Newgate Prison. Then, one morning, the great bell boomed at St. Sepulchre's. They put our hero into a cart, the sheriff going before and the javelin-men around. Seated on his coffin, with chaplain and hangman in attendance, he was driven the mile and a half along Tyburn Road, now Oxford Street, to three-armed Tyburn gallows. That little procession would halt more than once on the way. Like the gallant in the ballad, who "rode stately to Tyburn to die in his calling,"

He stopped at the "George" for a bottle of sack,
And promised to pay for it when he came back.

Easy-going custom allowed him to get royally loaded before Tyburn hove in sight. They saw no harm in this; the parson and the executioner were apt to be drunk, too. At Tyburn, if he played the game according to the rules, he made an affecting speech to the spectators, repented in tears, and was jerked into hell before an appreciative crowd.

The first noted highwayman to have his exploits recorded was one Isaac Atkinson, who flourished during the first 15 years of Charles the First's reign, and had a longer career than most. Son of a well-to-do landowner of Faringdon in Berkshire, young Isaac did little good at Brasenose College, Oxford. There he learned chiefly to "rail at the statutes of the university, lampoon the rulers, wear his clothes after the mode, curse his tutor, and sell his books," before being hauled home by an angry and disappointed father.

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At home he did no better. Addicted to "extravagance and lechery," any convenient woman serving his turn, he painted the countryside red until his outraged parent disinherited him and turned him out of doors. Making for London, Isaac soon spent what little money he had. A desperate young man returned forthwith to Berkshire. Arrived back home, he broke into the house one night, robbed his father—who by this time must really have been in a state—of "fifty pounds in silver and one hundred and twenty broad-pieces of gold," left some jeering doggerel in the family Bible, and decamped with the best horse in the stables.

The following Sunday, passing through Uxbridge on his way to London, Isaac went to church in a mood less than reverent. The parson preached from 1 Thes., v. 2, "For ye know that the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night," a sermon so full of zealous and pious exhortation that, muses the compiler, "any man less hardened in impiety than Atkinson must have gone away deeply affected."

It had indeed affected Isaac. When the service was over, and the clergyman had set off alone across the fields, our hero dogged the parson along the same path and overtook him half a mile from town.

"Stand and deliver!" says Isaac.

"Young sir, what do you mean by this?"

"I mean," replied the prodigal, "to let you know that all thieves do not come in the night. The next time you preach, you may tell the people that the day of the Lord cometh like a thief at noon: which, in my opinion, is a much better simile. At night we are led to expect thieves; but who the devil ever feared being robbed at noonday so near a town?"

Though unconvinced by this interpretation of Scripture, the dominie had no choice. He delivered up a silver watch and one pound eighteen shillings in cash. Forcing him off the path and trussing him securely with strips torn from the clerical gown, Isaac bolted in triumph with the fruits of his first daylight robbery.

Another of his victims is said to have been no less a personage than "that great Gamaliel of the law," William Noye, Attorney-General to King Charles. Both were on horseback when Isaac accosted him a mile or two outside London.

"Sir," began the highwayman, a flowery sort of fellow, "I have a writ of *Capias ad Computandum* against you, which requires an account of all the money in your pocket."

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If you must put the heat on an eminent lawyer, no doubt this is the way to address him. Asked on what authority he served the writ, Isaac produced a brace of pistols.

"These weapons, sir, have as much authority in them as any tipstaff in England. Of this you shall be convinced, if you make any delay."

William Noye is described by his contemporaries (*Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. xiv, p. 699) as a man of humorous mind Here his nonchalance seems to have been superb. "The Attorney-General had no more to say," our chronicler explains, "but very contentedly gave him a purse well lined, and they parted with mutual compliments."

Whether or not we believe this story, certain it is that Isaac Atkinson became the terror of all lawyers. He rode the circuits like any barrister or solicitor, plundering whom he would. In one eight months' period he is supposed to have held up more than 160 lawyers in the county of Norfolk alone, for an estimated haul of £3000. Finding the gentlemen of the long robe easy game, he would attack three, four, even five of them at once. And always he escaped, until tripped by an encounter from which he could have gained little profit.

The intended victim was an old market-woman mounted on a white mare. Cantering magnificently through Turnham Green one wet, muddy afternoon in the summer of 1640, Isaac saw in her hands a purse full of halfpennies. Imagining it contained more than it actually did, he crowded her towards the hedge. With much spirit the old woman flung the purse over the hedge into a field beyond and rode hard for the neighbouring town of Brentford to give the alarm.

It would get him nothing to pursue her; Isaac wanted the money. Dismounting, he climbed through the hedge into the field. His horse, having taken a fancy to the market-woman's white mare, and as alert for venery as Isaac himself, instantly galloped off in pursuit of the mare. Deprived of his horse, our hero was now in trouble. Rain had made the field a quagmire in which he sank to the calves of his fine jack-boots. However he writhed and cursed, he could neither pull his boots from the mire nor his feet from the boots, and he lacked a knife to cut himself free. The scourge of lawyers was stuck like a fly in treacle. At this juncture he heard the view-halloo bellow of ten men racing out from Brentford to take him.

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Isaac's temper boiled over. "God damme! Must I lose my liberty to a parcel of clods like these?" With the four pistols in his belt he slaughtered four of those who closed in, badly wounding a fifth with his sword. The other five set on him and pulled him down.

That finished Isaac Atkinson. In prison he tried and failed to kill himself before sentence could be carried out. He was hanged at Tyburn in that same summer of 1640, cursing the chaplain and jeering at authority until the end. Just two years later King Charles's standard went up at Nottingham, and civil war ripped apart the nation into camps of Roundhead and Cavalier.

During the next two decades—troubled days of war, and of the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell after wheeling-and-dealing parliament-men had cut off the king's head—any tales of highwaymen must be approached with great caution. Most of these swashbucklers were, or professed to be, fire-eating Cavaliers. They loved to rob a canting Puritan, whom they called (often with justice) a canting hypocrite, and to quote Scripture back at him while they robbed. But the chroniclers of their adventures had royalist sympathies, too. So numerous are the legends of highly placed Roundhead officials waylaid, mocked, and plundered that to accept all such accounts were to show the rest of us as gullible as the chroniclers themselves.

On the other hand, it is quite possible that "Captain" James Hind—no captain, but a butcher's apprentice before he took to the high toby—really did hold up the coach of Colonel Harrison, most fanatical of all the regicides, and of John Bradshaw, presiding judge at the trial of King Charles. He may well have shouted to Bradshaw, as they say he did, "I fear neither you nor any king-killing son of a whore alive. I have now as much power over you as you lately had over the king. Your money or your life!"

Such incidents have been called possible, even probable. James Hind merits special mention; no other mere outlaw was treated with such ferocity by the Roundhead government. Hind had committed several murders. If they had merely wanted him disposed of, this charge (or robbery itself) would have been enough. Instead they went out of their way to be merciless. Convicted of high treason, Hind was hanged, drawn, and quartered—the whole filthy sentence—on September 24th, 1652.

Exploits still more sensational are credited to Captain Zachary Howard, who really was a captain, and had raised a troop of horse

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for King Charles. He is also supposed to have fought valiantly in 1651, when the man who afterwards became Charles the Second tried in vain to topple Oliver Cromwell at the battle of Worcester. In the king's cause young Zachary Howard had mortgaged his estate for £20,000. Having lost everything when the Saints triumphed, he swore vengeance against Cromwell and all the tribe.

Zachary Howard is said to have waylaid the Earl of Essex, "Traitor Essex," one of the original Roundhead commanders. Perhaps so. But his escapade against the wife and daughter of "Black Tom" Fairfax, a still more eminent Roundhead general, followed by the robbery and humiliation of great Cromwell himself, forms a tale so tangled and confused that no study can set the record straight. Some truth there may be in all this, but how much?

For the tale tells, James Branch Cabell-wise, that in the summer of 1650 "Black Tom" Fairfax was being feted at Newcastle-on-Tyne by the mayor and aldermen, who presented him with a gift of silver plate. Recently Fairfax had sent his wife and his only daughter south to Faringdon in Berkshire (to Berkshire, so very far from their home, and to Faringdon, birthplace of the late Isaac Atkinson?). Wanting to send the silver service, too, he told his newest servant to pack it in a portmanteau, choose a good horse, and carry the gift to his wife.

Redoubtable Zachary Howard, shadowing Fairfax in hope of revenge, heard of this errand at a tavern. He rode after the servant and, pretending to be the most canting of Puritans, struck up an acquaintance with the Roundhead messenger. They journeyed together amicably until they were within a day's ride of Faringdon, at which time Zachary revealed himself and demanded the portmanteau.

The servant, as resolute as Captain Howard himself, wouldn't give in. Both men drew and fired. Since neither seems to have been what today would be described as a Top Gun, they exchanged shots until the servant drilled Zachary's horse and Zachary drilled the servant's head.

On the body of the slain Roundhead, Zachary found a letter from Fairfax to his wife. The contents of this curious document are given in full. Dated at Newcastle on August 12th, 1650, it is supposed to have said:

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My dear,—Hoping that you and my daughter Elizabeth are in good health, this comes to acquaint you that my presence is so agreeable to the inhabitants of this place, that their mayor and aldermen have presented me with a large quantity of plate, which I have sent to you by my man Thomas, a new servant; whom I would have you treat very kindly, he being recommended to me by several gentlemen as a very honest, worthy man. The Lord be praised, I am very well, and earnestly long for the happiness of enjoying your company.

Back to bold Zachary Howard! Hiding the portmanteau in a hollow tree, he rode on to Faringdon. Here he presented the letter, introducing himself as Thomas, the new servant, and explained that because of the danger from robbers he had lodged the silver for safekeeping at an inn along the road. Pleased at such sober, prudent behaviour, Lady Fairfax ordered him to bed so that he might rest from the fatigue of his journey.

The household at this time, says our chronicler, consisted only of the wife, the daughter, two maids, and two menservants. When everybody had turned in for the night, Zachary Howard intimidated the servants at pistol point; he bound and gagged them all. Proceeding to the bedroom of Lady Fairfax and her daughter, he bound and gagged them, too. He then raped both ladies, beginning with the daughter, and concluded by rifling the house of "two thousand broad-pieces and some silver." But a reward was posted for his capture, so he fled to Ireland.

Let's test the story a little.

It must be remembered that in 1648 "Black Tom" Fairfax had succeeded to his father's title as third Lord Fairfax. In June of 1650 he gave up his commission in the Commonwealth Army and retired permanently to a country house in Yorkshire. Just possibly the ex-general owned another house in the south, sending his family there for the summer. And the Fairfaxes did have one daughter, though at the time of the alleged rape she would have been only 12 years old. This need not embarrass belief; *Lolita* has prepared us for anything. But the young lady was named Mary, with no Elizabeth in her baptismal register, and presumably papa knew his daughter's name.

In Ireland, we are told, Zachary Howard robbed so many dupes and made his name so notorious that he thought it safer to return. He landed at Highlake and put up at an inn in Chester, where

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chance gave him the opportunity for his boldest stroke. To that same inn came none other than Oliver Cromwell, old Noll in person, visiting Chester with "a troop of horse."

By other dates of the narrative this must have been in 1652, a year before Cromwell became Lord Protector. Zachary played his usual trick: affecting to be a man of the deepest piety, he gained the dictator's ear and confidence. Late one night, alone with his victim in the latter's room, he walloped Cromwell over the head with a pistol butt and tied *him* up. "In a couple of trunks" Zachary found "about eleven hundred jacobuses," quite some haul. As a last humiliation he emptied on Cromwell the contents of a close-stool, the vehicle for indoor sanitation in those days, and escaped with the 1100 jacobuses (or jacobi).

This takes some believing, too. The Cromwell it pictures is as unconvincing as the sentimental Cromwell of *Curfew Shall Not Ring Tonight.* Though no domestic ogre, old Noll, in addition to being extremely tough and suspicious, had alert guards in uneasy times. And the jacobus, a gold coin worth from twenty to twenty-four shillings, was minted only in the reign of James the First (1603-1625). Unless Cromwell had been hoarding them, a trait foreign to his character, he is far from likely to have carried such a load in his luggage.

Zachary Howard's career was nearly over—something of a relief, since the record has grown far too scrambled. Our chronicler keeps his hero in Ireland between 1650 and 1652, forgetting that he has already placed Zachary at the battle of Worcester in 1651. Not long after the humiliation of Cromwell, if in truth anything like it ever occurred, the real-life Zachary was unwise enough to challenge half a dozen former Roundhead officers on Blackheath. One he killed, two he wounded in the ensuing fight; the rest haled him before a magistrate, who committed him to Maidstone Jail.

Trial and sentence followed swiftly. He suffered in 1652, the same year as James Hind. Eternal legend, of course, has Cromwell present at the execution. But there was no charge of treason; he would hang, without trimmings, for robbery and murder.

"Good people," Zachary said on the scaffold, "I am truly sorry for the murders I have done. And yet, since they were done only against a crew of cursed Roundhead rogues, I must own I regret them less than I should. God save the king!"

And so they hanged him at Maidstone, when he was only 32.

(to be concluded next month)

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a HERCULE POIROT detective story by

AGATHA CHRISTIE

Mrs. Pengelley brought a case to Poirot that, in the great detective's own words, interested him enormously. And for the most unusual reason: you see, the case was so absolutely usual—it presented "positively no new features." (Do you believe that? Ah, then you do not know Dame Agatha!)

THE CORNISH MYSTERY

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

"Mrs. Pengelley," announced our landlady, and withdrew discreetly.

Many unlikely people came to consult Poirot, but to my mind, the woman who stood nervously just inside the door, fingering her feather neck-piece, was the most unlikely of all. She was so extraordinarily commonplace—a thin faded woman of about 50 dressed in a braided coat and skirt, some gold jewelry at her neck, and with her gray hair surmounted by a singularly unbecoming hat. In any country town you pass a hundred Mrs. Pengelleys in the street every day.

Poirot came forward and greeted her pleasantly, perceiving her obvious embarrassment.

"Madame! Take a chair, I beg of you. My colleague, Captain Hastings."

The lady sat down, murmuring uncertainly, "You are M. Poirot, the detective?"

"At your service, madame."

But our guest was still tongue-tied. She sighed, twisted her fingers, and grew steadily redder and redder.

"There is something I can do for you, eh, madame?"

"Well, I thought—that is—you see—"

"Proceed, madame, I beg of you, proceed."

Mrs. Pengelley, thus encouraged, took a grip on herself.

"It's this way, M. Poirot—I don't want to have anything to do with the police. No, I

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wouldn't go to the police for anything! But all the same I'm sorely troubled about something. And yet I don't know if I ought—"

She stopped abruptly.

"Me, I have nothing to do with the police. My investigations are strictly private."

Mrs. Pengelley caught at the word.

"Private—that's what I want. I don't want any talk or fuss, or things in the papers. Wicked it is, the way they write things, until the family could never hold up their heads again. And it isn't as though I was even sure—it's just a dreadful idea that's come to me, and put it out of my head I can't." She paused for breath. "And all the time I may be wickedly wronging poor Edward. It's a terrible thought for any wife to have. But you do read of such dreadful things nowadays."

"Permit me, it is of your husband you speak?"

"Yes."

"And you suspect him of—what?"

"I don't like even to say it, M. Poirot. But you *do* read of such things happening—and the poor souls suspecting nothing."

I was beginning to despair of the lady's ever coming to the point, but Poirot's patience was equal to the demand made upon it.

"Speak without fear, madame. Think what joy will be yours if we are able to prove your suspicions unfounded."

"That's true—anything's better than this wearing uncertainty. Oh, M. Poirot, I'm dreadfully afraid I'm being *poisoned.*"

"What makes you think so?"

Mrs. Pengelley, her reticence leaving her, plunged into a full recital more suited to the ears of her medical attendant.

"Pain and sickness after food, eh?" said Poirot thoughtfully. "You have a doctor attending you, madame? What does he say?"

"He says it's acute gastritis, M. Poirot. But I can see that he's puzzled and uneasy, and he's always altering the medicine, but nothing helps."

"You have spoken of your—fears, to him?"

"No indeed, M. Poirot. It might get about in the town. And perhaps it *is* gastritis. All the same it's very odd that whenever Edward is away for the week-end I'm quite all right again. Even Freda noticed that—my niece, M. Poirot. And then there's that bottle of weed killer—never used, the gardener says, and yet it's half empty."

She looked appealingly at Poirot. He smiled reassuringly at her, and reached for a pencil and notebook.

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"Let us be businesslike, madame. Now, then, you and your husband reside—where?"

"Polgarwith, a small market town in Cornwall."

"You have lived there long?"

"Fourteen years."

"And your household consists of you and your husband. Any children?"

"No."

"But a niece, I think you said?"

"Yes, Freda Stanton, the child of my husband's only sister. She has lived with us for the last eight years—that is, until a week ago."

"Oho, and what happened a week ago?"

"Things hadn't been very pleasant for some time; I don't know what had come over Freda. She was so rude and impertinent, and her temper something shocking, and in the end she flared up one day, and out she walked and took rooms of her own in the town. I've not seen her since. Better leave her to come to her senses, so Mr. Radnor says."

"Who is Mr. Radnor?"

Some of Mrs. Pengelley's initial embarrassment returned.

"Oh, he's—he's just a friend. Very pleasant young fellow."

"Anything between him and your niece?"

"Nothing whatever," said Mrs. Pengelley emphatically.

Poirot shifted his ground.

"You and your husband are, I presume, in comfortable circumstances?"

"Yes, we're very nicely off."

"The money, is it yours or your husband's?"

"Oh, it's all Edward's. I've nothing of my own."

"You see, madame, to be businesslike, we must be brutal. We must seek for a motive. Your husband, he would not poison you just *pour passer le temps!* Do you know of any reason why he should wish you out of the way?"

"There's the yellow-haired hussy who works for him," said Mrs. Pengelley, with a flash of temper. "My husband's a dentist, M. Poirot, and nothing would do but he must have a smart girl, as he said, with bobbed hair and a white uniform to make his appointments and mix his fillings for him. It's coming to my ears that there have been fine goings-on, though of course he swears it's all right."

"This bottle of weed killer, madame, who ordered it?"

"My husband, about a year ago."

"Your niece, now, has she any money of her own?"

"About fifty pounds a year, I should say. She'd be glad enough to come back and keep house for Edward if I left him."

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"You have contemplated leaving him, then?"

"I don't intend to let him have it all his own way. Women aren't the downtrodden slaves they were in old days, M. Poirot."

"I congratulate you on your independent spirit, madame, but let us be practical. You return to Polgarwith today?"

"Yes, I came up by an excursion. Six this morning the train started, and the train back goes at five this afternoon."

"*Bien!* I have nothing of great moment on hand. I can devote myself to your little affair. Tomorrow I shall be in Polgarwith. Shall we say that Hastings, here, is a distant relative of yours, the son of your second cousin? Me, I am his eccentric foreign friend. In the meantime eat only what is prepared by your own hands, or under your eye. You have a maid whom you trust?"

"Jessie is a very good girl, I am sure."

"Till tomorrow then, madame, and be of good courage."

Poirot bowed the lady out, and returned thoughtfully to his chair. His absorption was not so great, however, that he failed to see two minute strands of feather scarf wrenched off by the lady's fingers. He collected them and consigned them to the wastepaper basket.

"What do you make of the case, Hastings?"

"A nasty business, I should say."

"Yes, if what the lady suspects be true. But is it? Woe betide any husband who orders a bottle of weed killer nowadays! If his wife suffers from gastritis, and is inclined to be of a hysterical temperament, the fat is in the fire."

"You think that is all there is to it?"

"Ah, *voila*, I do not know, Hastings. But the case interests me—it interests me enormously. For, see you, it has positively no new features. Hence the hysterical theory, and yet Mrs. Pengelley did not strike me as being a hysterical woman. Yes, if I mistake not, we have here a very poignant human drama. Tell me, Hastings, what do you consider Mrs. Pengelley's feelings toward her husband to be?"

"Loyalty struggling with fear," I suggested.

"Yet, ordinarily, a woman will accuse anyone in the world—but not her husband. She will stick to her belief in him through thick and thin."

"The 'other woman' complicates the matter."

"Yes, affection may turn to hate, under the stimulus of jealousy. But hate would take her to the police—not to me.

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She would want an outcry, a scandal. No, no, let us exercise our little gray cells. Why did she come to me? To have her suspicions proved wrong? Or—to have them proved *right?* Ah, we have here something I do not understand—an unknown factor. Is she a superb actress, our Mrs. Pengelley? No, she was genuine, I would swear that she was genuine, and therefore, I am interested. Look up the trains to Polgarwith, I pray you."

The best train of the day was the 1:50 from Paddington which reached Polgarwith just after seven o'clock. The journey was uneventful, and I had to rouse myself from a pleasant nap to alight upon the platform of the bleak little station. We took our bags to the Duchy Hotel, and after a light meal Poirot suggested our stepping round to pay an after-dinner call on my so-called cousin.

The Pengelleys' house stood a little way back from the road with an old-fashioned cottage garden in front. The smell of stocks and mignonette came sweetly wafted on the evening breeze. It seemed impossible to associate thoughts of violence with the Old World charm.

Poirot rang and knocked. As the summons was not answered he rang again. This time, after a little pause, the door was opened by a disheveled-looking servant. Her eyes were red, and she was sniffing violently.

"We wish to see Mrs. Pengelley," explained Poirot. "May we enter?"

The maid stared. Then, with unusual directness, she answered, "Haven't you heard, then? She's dead. Died this evening—about half an hour ago."

We stood staring at her, stunned.

"What did she die of?" I asked at last.

"There's some as could tell." She gave a quick glance over her shoulder. "If it wasn't that somebody ought to be in the house with the missus I'd pack my box and go tonight. But I'll not leave her dead with no one to watch by her. It's not my place to say anything, and I'm not going to say anything—but everybody knows. It's all over the town. And if Mr. Radnor don't write to the 'Ome Secretary, someone else will.

"The doctor may say what he likes, but didn't I see the master with my own eyes a-lifting down of the weed killer from the shelf this very evening? And didn't he jump when he turned round and saw me watching of him? And the missus' gruel there on the table, all ready to take to her? Not another bit of food passes my lips while I am

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in this house! Not if I dies for it."

"Where does the doctor live who attended your mistress?"

"Dr. Adams. Round the corner there in High Street. The second house."

Poirot turned away abruptly. He was very pale.

"For a girl who was not going to say anything, that girl said a lot," I remarked drily.

Poirot struck his clenched hand into his palm.

"An imbecile, a criminal imbecile, that is what I have been, Hastings. I have boasted of my little gray cells, and now I have lost a human life, a life that came to me to be saved. Never did I dream that anything would happen so soon. May the good God forgive me, but I never believed anything would happen at all. Her story seemed to me artificial. Ah, here we are at the doctor's. Let us see what he can tell us."

Dr. Adams was the typical genial red-faced country doctor of fiction. He received us politely enough, but at a hint of our errand his red face became purple.

"Damned nonsense! Damned nonsense, every word of it! Wasn't I in attendance on the case? Gastritis—gastritis pure and simple. This town's a hotbed of gossip—a lot of scandalmongering old women get together and invent God-knows-what. They read these scurrilous rags of newspapers, and nothing will suit them but that someone in their town shall get poisoned, too. They see a bottle of weed killer on a shelf—and *presto!*—away goes their imagination with the bit between its teeth. I know Edward Pengelley—he wouldn't poison his grandmother's dog. And why should he poison his wife? Tell me that?"

"There is one thing, M. le Docteur, that perhaps you do not know."

And very briefly Poirot outlined the main facts of Mrs. Pengelley's visit to him. No one could have been more astonished than Dr. Adams.

"God bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "The poor woman must have been mad. Why didn't she speak to me? That was the proper thing to do."

"And have her fears ridiculed?"

"Not at all, not at all. I hope I've got an open mind."

Poirot looked at him and smiled. The physician was evidently more perturbed than he cared to admit.

As we left the house Poirot broke into a laugh. "He is as obstinate as a pig, that one. He has said it is gastritis; therefore it is gastritis! All the same he has the mind uneasy."

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"What's our next step?"

"A return to the Inn, and a night of horror upon one of your English provincial beds, *mon ami.* It is a thing to make pity, the cheap English bed!"

"And tomorrow?"

"*Rien a faire.* We must return to town and await developments."

"That's very tame," I said, disappointed. "Suppose there are none?"

"There will be, I can promise you that. Our old doctor may give as many certificates as he pleases. He cannot stop several hundred tongues from wagging. And they will wag to some purpose, I can tell you that!"

Our train for town left at 11:00 the following morning. Before we started for the station, Poirot expressed a wish to see Miss Freda Stanton, the niece mentioned to us by the dead woman. We found the house where she was lodging easily enough. With her was a tall dark young man whom she introduced in some confusion as Mr. Jacob Radnor.

Miss Freda Stanton was an extremely pretty girl of the old Cornish type—dark hair and eyes and rosy cheeks. There was a flash in those same dark eyes which told of a temper that it would not be wise to provoke.

"Poor Auntie," she said, when Poirot had introduced himself, and explained his business. "It's terribly sad. I've been wishing all morning that I'd been kinder and more patient."

"You stood a great deal, Freda," interrupted Radnor.

"Yes, Jacob, but I've got a sharp temper, I know. After all, it was only silliness on Auntie's part. I ought to have just laughed and not minded. Of course, it's all nonsense her thinking that Uncle was poisoning her. She *was* worse after any food he gave her—but I'm sure it was only from her thinking about it. She made up her mind she would be, and then she was."

"What was the actual cause of your disagreement, mademoiselle?"

Miss Stanton hesitated, looking at Radnor. That young gentleman was quick to take the hint.

"I must be getting along, Freda. See you this evening. Goodbye, gentlemen; you're on your way to the station, I suppose?"

Poirot replied that we were, and Radnor departed.

"You are affianced, is it not so?" demanded Poirot, with a sly smile.

Freda Stanton blushed and admitted that such was the case.

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"And that was really the whole trouble with Auntie," she added.

"She did not approve of the match for you?"

"Oh, it wasn't that so much. But you see, she—" The girl came to a stop.

"Yes?" encouraged Poirot.

"It seems rather a horrid thing to say about her, now she's dead. But you'll never understand unless I tell you. Auntie was absolutely infatuated with Jacob."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, wasn't it absurd? She was over fifty, and he's not quite thirty! But there it was. She was silly about him! I had to tell her at last that it was me he was after—and she carried on dreadfully. She wouldn't believe a word of it, and was so rude and insulting that it's no wonder I lost my temper. I talked it over with Jacob, and we agreed that the best thing to do was for me to clear out for a bit till she came to her senses. Poor Auntie, I suppose she was in a queer state altogether."

"It would certainly seem so. Thank you, mademoiselle, for making things so clear to me."

A little to my surprise, Radnor was waiting for us in the street below.

"I can guess pretty well what Freda has been telling you," he remarked. "It was a most unfortunate thing to happen, and very awkward for me, as you can imagine. I need hardly say that it was none of my doing. I was pleased at first, because I imagined the old woman was helping on things with Freda. The whole thing was absurd—but extremely unpleasant."

"When are you and Miss Stanton going to be married?"

"Soon, I hope. Now, M. Poirot, I'm going to be candid with you. I know a bit more than Freda does. She believes her uncle to be innocent. I'm not so sure. But I can tell you one thing: I'm going to keep my mouth shut about what I do know. Let sleeping dogs lie. I don't want my wife's uncle tried and hanged for murder."

"Why do you tell me all this?"

"Because I've heard of you, and I know you're a clever man. It's quite possible that you might ferret out a case against him. But I put it to you—what good is that? The poor woman is past help, and she'd have been the last person to want a scandal—why, she'd turn in her grave at the mere thought of it."

"You are probably right there. You want me to—hush it up, then?"

"That's my idea. I'll admit

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frankly that I'm selfish about it. I've got my way to make—I'm building up a good little business in town as a tailor and outfitter."

"Most of us are selfish, Mr. Radnor. Not all of us admit it so freely. I will do what you ask—but I tell you frankly you will not succeed in hushing it up."

"Why not?"

Poirot held up a finger. It was market day, and we were passing the market—a busy hum came from within.

"The voice of the people—that is why. Ah, we must run, or we shall miss our train."

"Very interesting, is it not, Hastings?" said Poirot, as the train steamed out of the station.

He had taken out a small comb from his pocket, also a tiny mirror, and was carefully arranging his mustache, the symmetry of which had become slightly impaired during our brisk run.

"You seem to find it so," I replied. "To me it is all rather sordid and unpleasant. There's hardly any mystery about it."

"I agree with you; there is no mystery whatever."

"I suppose we can accept the girl's rather extraordinary story of her aunt's infatuation? That seemed the only fishy part to me. She was such a nice respectable woman."

"There is nothing extraordinary about that—it is completely ordinary. If you read the papers carefully, you will find that often a nice respectable woman of that age leaves a husband she has lived with for twenty years, and sometimes a whole family of children as well, in order to link her life with that of a young man considerably her junior. You admire *les femmes*, Hastings; you prostrate yourself before all of them who are good-looking and have the good taste to smile upon you; but psychologically you know nothing whatever about them. In the autumn of a woman's life there comes always one mad moment when she longs for romance, for adventure—before it is too late. It comes none the less surely to a woman because she is a wife of a respectable dentist in a country town!"

"And you think—"

"That a clever man might take advantage of such a moment."

"I shouldn't call Pengelley so clever," I mused. "He's got the whole town by the ears. And yet I suppose you're right. The only two men who know anything, Radnor and the doctor, both want to hush it up. Pengelley's managed that. I

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wish we'd seen the fellow."

"You can indulge your wish. Return by the next train and invent an aching molar."

I looked at Poirot keenly. "I wish I knew what you considered so interesting about the case."

"My interest is very aptly summed up by a remark of yours, Hastings. After interviewing the maid you observed that for anyone who was not going to say a word, she had said a good deal."

"Oh!" I said doubtfully; then I harped back to my original criticism. "I wonder why you made no attempt to see Pengelley?"

"*Mon ami*, I give him three months. Then I shall see him as long as I please—in the dock."

For once I thought Poirot's prognostications were going to be proved wrong. The time went by, and nothing happened in our Cornish case. Other matters occupied us, and I had nearly forgotten the Pengelley tragedy when it was suddenly recalled to me by a short paragraph in the paper which stated that an order to exhume the body of Mrs. Pengelley had been obtained from the Home Secretary.

A few days later, and "The Cornish Mystery" was the front-page topic of every paper. It seemed that gossip had never entirely died down, and when the engagement of the widower to Miss Marks, his secretary, was announced, the tongues burst out again louder than ever. Finally a petition was sent to the Home Secretary; the body was exhumed; large quantities of arsenic were discovered; and Mr. Pengelley was arrested and charged with the murder of his wife.

Poirot and I attended the preliminary proceedings. The evidence was as might have been expected. Dr. Adams admitted that the symptoms of arsenical poisoning might easily be mistaken for those of gastritis. The Home Office expert gave his evidence; the maid Jessie poured out a flood of voluble information, most of which was rejected, but which certainly strengthened the case against the prisoner.

Freda Stanton gave evidence as to her aunt's being worse whenever she ate food prepared by her husband. Jacob Radnor told how he had dropped in unexpectedly on the day of Mrs. Pengelley's death and found Pengelley replacing the bottle of weed killer on the pantry shelf, Mrs. Pengelley's gruel being on the table close by. Then Miss Marks, the fair-haired secretary, was called, and wept and went into

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hysterics and admitted that there had been "passages" between her and her employer, and that he had promised to marry her in the event of anything happening to his wife.

Pengelley reserved his defense and was sent for trial.

Jacob Radnor walked back with us to our lodgings.

"You see, M. Radnor," said Poirot, "I was right. The voice of the people spoke—and with no uncertain voice. There was to be no hushing up of this case."

"You were quite right," sighed Radnor. "Do you see any chance of his getting off?"

"Well, he has reserved his defense. He may have something—up the sleeve, as you English say. Come in with us, will you not?"

Radnor accepted the invitation. I ordered two whiskies and sodas and a cup of chocolate. The last order caused consternation, and I much doubted whether it would ever put in an appearance.

"Of course," continued Poirot, "I have a good deal of experience in matters of this kind. And I see only one loophole of escape for our friend."

"What is that?"

"That you should sign this paper."

With the suddenness of a conjuror he produced a sheet of paper covered with writing.

"What is it?"

"A confession that *you* murdered Mrs. Pengelley."

There was a moment's pause; then Radnor laughed. "You must be mad!"

"No, no, my friend, I am not mad. You came here; you started a little business; you were short of money. Mr. Pengelley was a man very well to do. You met his niece; she was inclined to smile upon you. But the small dowry that Pengelley might have given her upon her marriage was not enough for you. You must get rid of *both the uncle and the aunt;* then the money would come to the niece, since she was the only relative.

"How cleverly you set about it! You made love to that plain middle-aged woman until she was your slave. You implanted in her doubts of her husband. She discovered first that he was deceiving her—then, under your guidance, that he was trying to poison her. You were often at the house; you had opportunities to introduce the arsenic into her food. But you were careful never to do so when her husband was away.

"Being a woman, she did not keep her suspicions to herself. She talked to her niece;

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doubtless she talked to other women friends. Your only difficulty was keeping up separate relations with the two women, and even that was not so difficult as it looked. You explained to the aunt that, to allay the suspicions of her husband, you had to pretend to pay court to the niece. And the younger lady needed little convincing—she would never consider her aunt as a rival.

"But then Mrs. Pengelley made up her mind, without saying anything to you, to consult *me*. If she could be really assured, beyond any possible doubt, that her husband was trying to poison her, she would feel justified in leaving him and linking her life with yours—which is what she imagined you wanted her to do.

"But that did not suit your book at all. You did not want a detective prying around. A favorable minute occurs. You are in the house when Mr. Pengelley is getting some gruel for his wife, and you introduce the fatal dose. The rest is easy. Apparently anxious to hush matters up, you secretly foment them. But you reckoned without Hercule Poirot, my intelligent friend."

Radnor was deadly pale, but he still endeavored to carry off matters with a high hand.

"Very interesting and ingenious, but why tell me all this?"

"Because, monsieur, I represent not the law, but Mrs. Pengelley. For her sake I give you a chance of escape. Sign this paper, and you shall have twenty-four hours' start—twenty-four hours before I place it in the hands of the police."

Radnor hesitated.

"You can't prove anything."

"Can't I? I am Hercule Poirot. Look out of the window, monsieur. There are two men in the street. They have orders not to lose sight of you."

Radnor strode across to the window and pulled aside the blind, then shrank back with an oath.

"You see, monsieur? Sign—it is your best chance."

"What guarantee have I—"

"That I shall keep faith? The word of Hercule Poirot. You will sign? Good. Hastings, be so kind as to pull that left-hand blind halfway up. That is the signal that Mr. Radnor may leave unmolested."

White, muttering oaths, Radnor hurried from the room.

Poirot nodded gently. "A coward! I always knew it."

"It seems to me, Poirot, that you've acted in a criminal manner," I cried angrily. "You always preach against senti-

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ment. And here you are letting a dangerous criminal escape out of sheer sentimentality."

"That was not sentiment—that was business," replied Poirot. "Do you not see, my friend, that we have no shadow of proof against him? Shall I get up and say to twelve stolid Cornishmen that *I*, Hercule Poirot, *know*? They would laugh at me. The only chance was to frighten him and get a confession that way. Those two loafers that I noticed outside came in very useful. Pull down the blind again, will you, Hastings? Not that there was any reason for raising it. It was part of the *mise en scene*.

"Well, well, we must keep our word. Twenty-four hours, did I say? So much longer for poor Mr. Pengelley—and it is no more than he deserves; for mark you, he deceived his wife. I am very strong on the family life, as you know. Ah, well, twenty-four hours—and then? I have great faith in Scotland Yard. They will get him, *mon ami*; they will get him."

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a *NEW* short story by

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

A beautifully developed character study of a college professor, his wife, and a "genuinely starving poet who lived in a genuine garret," and of the events leading up to the denouement. . .

THE BABY SPOON

by PATRICIA HIGHSMITH

Claude Lamm, Professor of English Literature and Poetry, had been on the faculty of Columbia University for ten years. Short and inclined to plumpness, with a bald spot in the middle of his close-cropped black hair, he did not look like a college professor, but rather like a small businessman hiding in clothes he thought a college professor should wear—good tweed jackets with leather patches on the elbows, unpressed gray flannels, and unshined shoes.

He lived in one of the great dreary apartment houses that clump east and south of Columbia University, a gloomy, ash-colored building with a shaky elevator and an ugly miscellany of smells old and new inside it. Claude Lamm rendered his sunless, five-room apartment still more somber by cramming it with sodden-looking sofas, with books and periodicals and photographs of classic edifices and landscapes about which he professed to be sentimental but actually was not.

Seven years ago he had married Margaret Cullen, one of those humdrum, colorless individuals who look as if they might be from anywhere except New York and turn out, incredibly, to be native New Yorkers. She was 50, eight years older than Claude, with a plain, open countenance and an air of desperate inferiority. Claude had met her through another professor who had known Margaret's father, and had married her because of certain unconscious drives in himself toward the maternal.

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But under Margaret's matronly exterior lay a nature that was half childish, too, and peculiarly irritating to Claude. Outside of her cooking and sewing—she did neither well—and the uninspired routine that might be called the running of the house, she had no interests. Except for an occasional exchange of letters, which she bored Claude by reading aloud at the table, she had detached herself from her old friends.

Claude came home at 5:00 most afternoons, had some tea, and planned his work and reading for the evening. At 6:15 he drank a martini without ice and read the evening paper in the living room, while Margaret prepared their early dinner. They dined on shoulder lamb chops or meat loaf, often on cheese and macaroni which Margaret was fond of, and Margaret stirred her coffee with the silver baby spoon she had used the first evening Claude had met her, holding the spoon by the tip end of the handle in order to reach the bottom of the cup.

After dinner Claude would retire to his study—a book-glutted cubicle with an old black-leather couch in it—to read and correct papers and to browse in his bookshelves for anything that piqued his aimless curiosity.

Every two weeks he asked Professor Millikin, a Shakespeare scholar, or Assistant Professor George and his wife to come to dinner. Three times a year the apartment was thrown open to twelve students from his special readings classes, who came and ate dundee cake and drank tea. Margaret would sit on a cushion on the floor, because there were never enough chairs, and of course one young man after another would offer his chair to her.

"Oh, no, thank you!" Margaret would protest with a lisping coyness quite unlike her usual manner. "I'm perfectly comfortable here. Sitting on the floor makes me feel like a little girl again."

She would look up at the young men as if she expected them to tell her she did look like a little girl, which to Claude's disgust the young men sometimes did. The "little girl" mood always came over Margaret in the company of men, and always made Claude sneer when he saw it.

Claude sneered easily and uncontrollably, hiding it in the act of putting his cigarette holder between his teeth or by rubbing the side of his nose with a forefinger. Claude had keen, suspicious brown eyes. No feature of his face was remarkable, but it was not a

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face one forgot easily. It was the restlessness, the furtiveness in his face that one noticed and remembered. At the teas Margaret would use her baby spoon, which as likely as not would start a conversation. Then Claude would move out of hearing.

Claude did not like the way the young men looked at his wife—disappointedly, a little pityingly, always solemnly. Claude was ashamed of her before them. She should have been beautiful and vivacious, a nymph of the soul, with a fair face that would accord with the love poems of Donne and Sidney. Well, she wasn't.

Claude's marriage to Margaret might have been comparable to a marriage with his housekeeper, if not for emotional entanglements that made him passionately hate her as well as passionately need her. He hated her childishness with a vicious and personal resentment. He hated almost as much her competent, maternal ministerings to him—her taking his clothes to the cleaners, for instance—which was all he tolerated her for, he knew, and why he had *her* now instead of his nymph.

When he had been down with flu one winter and Margaret had waited on him hand and foot, he had sneered often at her retreating back, hating her, really hating her obsequious devotion to him. Claude had despised his mother and she, too, between periods of neglect and erratic ill temper, had been capable of smothering him with affection and attention. But the nearest he came to expressing his hatred of Margaret was to announce casually once a week, "Winston's coming over for a while tonight."

"Oh," Margaret would reply with a tremor in her voice. "Well, I suppose he'd like some of the raisin cake later. Or maybe a sandwich of the meat loaf."

Winston loved to eat at Claude's house. Or rather, he was always hungry. Winston was a genuinely starving poet who lived in a genuine garret at the top of a brownstone house in the West Seventies. He had been a student of Claude's three years ago, a highly promising student whose brilliant, aggressive mind had so dominated his classmates that the classes had been hardly more than conversations between Claude and Winston. Claude was immensely fond of Winston and flattered by Winston's fondness for him. From the first it had excited Claude in a strange and pleasant way to catch Winston's smile, Winston's wink even, the glint of mad humor in his eyes, in

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the midst of Winston's flurry of words in class.

While at Columbia, Winston had published several poems in poetry magazines and literary magazines. He had written a poem called "The Booming Bittern," a mournful satire on an undergraduate's life and on directionless rebellion that Claude had thought might take the place in Winston's career that "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" had taken in T. S. Eliot's. The poem had been published in some quarterly, but had attracted no important attention.

Claude had expected Winston to go far and do him credit. But Winston had published only one thin book of verse since leaving college. Something had happened to Winston's easy, original flow of thought. Something had happened to his self-confidence after leaving Columbia, as if the wells of inspiration were drying up along with the sap and vitality of his twenty-four-year-old body. Winston was thin as a rail now. He had always been thin, but now he slouched, hung his head like a wronged and resentful man, and his eyes under the hard straight brows looked anxious, hostile, and unhappy.

He clung to Claude with the persistence of a maltreated child clinging to the one human being who had ever given him kindness and encouragement. Winston was working now on a novel in the form of a long poem. He had submitted part of it to his publishers a year ago, and they had refused to give him an advance. But Claude liked it, and Winston's attitude was, the rest of the world be damned.

Claude was keenly aware of Winston's emotional dependence on him, and managed to hide his own dependence on Winston in the superior, patronizing manner he assumed with Winston. Claude's hostility to Margaret found some further release in the contempt that Winston openly showed for her intellect.

One evening, more than usually late in arriving, Winston slouched into the living room without a reply to Claude's greeting. He was a head and a half taller than Claude, even when he stooped; his dark brown hair was untidy with wind and rain, his overcoat was clutched about his splinter of a body by the hands rammed into its pockets. Slowly and without a glance at Margaret, Winston walked across the living room toward Claude's study.

Claude was a little annoyed. This was a mood he didn't know.

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"Listen, old man, can you lend me some money?" Winston asked when they were alone in the study, then continued over Claude's surprised murmur, "You've no idea what it took for me to come here and ask you, but now it's done, anyway." He sighed heavily.

Claude had a sudden feeling it hadn't taken anything, and that the despondent mood was only play-acting. "You know I've always let you have money if you needed it, Winston. Don't take it so seriously. Sit down." Claude sat down.

Winston did not move. His eyes had their usual fierceness, yet there was an impatient pleading in them, too, like the eyes of a child demanding something rightfully his own. "I mean a lot of money. Five hundred dollars. I need it to work on. Five hundred will see me through six weeks, and I can finish my book without any more interruptions."

Claude winced a little. He'd never see the money again if he lent it to Winston, who already owed him about two hundred. It occurred to Claude that Winston had not been so intense about anything since his university days. And it also came to him, swiftly and tragically, that Winston would never finish his book. Winston would always be stuck at the anxious, furious pitch he was now, which was contingent on his not finishing the book.

"You've got to help me out this last time, Claude," Winston said in a begging tone.

"Let me think it over. I'll write you a note about it tomorrow. How's that, fellow?"

Claude got up and went to his desk for a cigarette. Suddenly he hated Winston for standing there begging for money. Like anybody else, Claude thought bitterly. His lip lifted as he set the cigarette holder between his teeth, and Winston saw it, he knew. Winston never missed anything. Why couldn't tonight have been like all the other evenings, Claude thought, Winston smoking Claude's cigarettes, propping his feet on the corner of Claude's desk, Winston laughing and making him laugh, Winston adoring him for all the jibes he threw at the teaching profession?

"You crumb," Winston's voice said steadily. "You fat smug jerk of a college professor. You stultifier and castrator of the intellect."

Claude stood where he was, half turned away from Winston. The words might have been a blunt ramrod that Winston had thrust through Claude's skull and down to his feet. Winston

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had never spoken to him like that, and Claude literally did not know how to take it. Claude was not used to reacting to Winston as he reacted to other people.

"I'll write you a note about it tomorrow. I'll just have to figure out how and when," he said shortly, with the dignity of a professor whose position, though not handsomely paid, commanded a certain respect.

"I'm sorry," Winston said, hanging his head.

"Winston, what's the matter with you?"

"I don't know." Winston covered his face with his hands.

Claude felt a swift sense of regret, of disappointment at Winston's weakness. He mustn't let Margaret know, he thought. "Sit down."

Winston sat down. He sipped the little glass of whiskey that Claude poured from the bottle in his desk as if it were a medicine he desperately needed. Then he sprawled his scarecrow legs out in front of him and said something about a book that Claude had lent him the last time he was here, a book of poetry criticism.

Claude was grateful for the change of subject Winston talked with his eyes sleepily half shut, moving his big head suddenly now and then for emphasis; but Claude could see the glint of interest, of affection, of some indefinable speculation about himself through the half-closed lids, and could feel the focus of Winston's intense and personal interest like the life-bringing rays of a sun.

Later they had coffee and sandwiches and cake in the living room with Margaret. Winston grew very animated and entertained them with a story of his quest for a hotel room in the town of Jalapa in Mexico, a story pulled like an unexpected toy from the hotchpotch of Winston's mind, and by Winston's words set in motion and given a life of its own. Claude felt proud of Winston. "See what I amuse myself with behind the door of my study, while you creep about in the dull prison of your own mind," Claude might have been saying aloud as he glanced at Margaret to see if she was appreciating Winston.

Claude did not write to Winston the next day. He felt that Winston was in no more need of money than usual, and that Winston's crisis would pass if the two of them didn't communicate for a while. Then on the second evening Margaret told Claude that she had lost her baby spoon. She had looked all over the house for it, she said.

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"Maybe it fell behind the refrigerator," Claude suggested.

"I was hoping you'd help me move it."

A smile pulled at Claude's mouth as he jockeyed the refrigerator away from the wall. He hoped she had lost the spoon. It was a silly thing to treasure at the age of 50, sillier than her high-school scrapbooks and the bronzed baby shoe that had sat on her father's desk and that Margaret had claimed after his death. Claude hoped she had swept the spoon into the garbage by accident and that it was out of the house forever.

"Nothing but dust," Claude said, looking down at the mess of fine sticky gray dust on the floor and the refrigerator cord.

The refrigerator was only the beginning. Claude's cooperation inspired Margaret. That evening she turned the kitchen inside out, looked behind all the furniture in the living room, even looked in the bathroom medicine cabinet and in the clothes hamper.

"It's just not in the house," she kept saying to Claude in a lost way. After another day of searching she gave up.

Claude heard her telling the woman next door about it.

"You remember it, I suppose. I think I once showed it to you when we had coffee and cake here."

"Yes, I do remember. That's too bad," said the neighbor.

Margaret told the newsstore man, too. It embarrassed Claude painfully as he stood there staring at the rows of candy bars and Margaret said hesitantly to the man she'd hardly dared speak to before, "I did mean to pay our bill yesterday, but I've been a little distracted. I lost a very old keepsake—an old piece of silver I was very fond of. A baby spoon."

Then at the phrase "an old piece of silver," Claude realized that Winston had taken it. Winston might have thought it had a quick cash value at the pawnbroker, or he might have taken it out of malice. He could have palmed it that last night he was at the house. Claude smiled to himself.

Claude had known for years that Winston stole little things —a glass paperweight, an old cigarette lighter that didn't work, a photograph of Claude. Until now Winston had chosen only Claude's possessions. For sentimental reasons, Claude thought.

Three more days passed and the spoon did not turn up. And there was no word from Winston. Margaret wrote some letters in the evenings, and Claude knew she was saying in each and every one of them

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that she had lost her baby spoon and that it was unforgivably careless of her. It was like a confession of some terrible sin that she had to make to everyone she knew. And more, she seemed to want to tell everyone, "Here I stand, bereft."

She wanted to hear their words of comfort, their reassuring phrases about such things happening to everybody. Claude had seen her devouring the sympathy that the delicatessen woman had offered her. And he saw her anxiety in the way she opened the letter from her sister in Staten Island. Margaret read the letter at the table, and though it didn't say anything about the baby spoon it seemed to put Margaret in better spirits, as if her sister's not mentioning it were a guarantee of her absolution.

Assistant Professor Leonard George and his wife Lydia came to dinner one evening, and Margaret told them about the spoon. Lydia, who was by no means stupid but very good at talking about nothing, went on and on about how disquietening the losses of keepsakes were at first, and how unimportant they seemed later. Margaret's face grew gradually less troubled until finally she was smiling. After dinner she said on her own initiative, "Well, who wants to play some bridge?"

Margaret put on a little lipstick now when they sat down to dinner. It all happened in about ten days. The inevitable pardons she got from people after confessing the loss of her baby spoon seemed to break the barriers between herself and the adult world. Claude began to think he might never see that horrible coyness again when young men came to semester teas. He really ought to thank Winston for it, he supposed. It amused him to think of grasping Winston's hand and thanking him for relieving the household of the accursed baby spoon. He would have to be careful how he did it, because Winston didn't know that Claude knew about his petty thieveries. But perhaps it was time Winston did. Claude still resented Winston's begging for money and those shocking moments of rudeness the last time he had visited.

Yes, Winston wanted bringing into line. Claude would let Winston know he knew about the spoon, and he would also let him have $300.

Winston hadn't yet called, so Claude wrote a note to him, inviting him to dinner Sunday night, and saying he was prepared to lend him $300. "Come early so we can have a

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little talk first," Claude wrote.

Winston was smiling when he arrived, and he was wearing a clean white shirt. But the white collar only accentuated the grayness of his face, the shadows in his cheeks.

"Working hard?" Claude asked as they went into his study.

"You bet," Winston said. "I want to read you a couple of pages about the subway ride Jake takes." Jake was the main character in Winston's book.

Winston was about to begin reading when Margaret arrived with a shaker of whiskey sours and a plate of canapés.

"By the way, Winston," Claude began when Margaret had left. "I want to thank you for a little service I think you rendered me the last time you were here."

Winston looked at him. "What was that?"

"Did you see anything of a silver spoon, a little silver baby spoon?" Claude asked him with a smile.

Winston's eyes were suddenly wary. "No. No, I didn't."

Claude saw that Winston was guilty, and embarrassed. Claude laughed easily. "Didn't you take it, Winston? I'd be delighted if you did."

"Take it? No, I certainly didn't." Winston started toward the cocktail tray and stopped, frowning harder at Claude, his stooped figure rigid.

"Now look here—" Why had he begun it before Winston had had a couple of cocktails? Claude thought of Winston's hollow stomach and felt as if his words were dropping into it. "Look here, Winston, you know I'm terribly fond of you."

"What's this all about?" Winston demanded, and now his voice shook and he looked completely helpless to conceal his guilt. He half turned round, then turned back again, as if guilt pinned his big shoes to the floor.

Claude tipped his head back and drank the entire contents of his glass. He said with a smile, "You know I know you've taken a few things from me. It couldn't matter to me less. I'm glad you wanted to take them, in fact."

"What things? That's not true, Claude." Winston laid his sprawling hand over the conch shell on the bookcase. He stood upright now and there was something even militant about his tall figure and the affronted stare he gave Claude.

"Winston, have a drink." Claude wished now that he hadn't begun it. He should have known Winston wouldn't be able to take it. Maybe he had destroyed their friendship—for

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nothing. Claude wondered if he should try to take it all back, pretend he had been joking. "Have a drink," he repeated.

"But you can't accuse me of being a thief!" Winston said in a horrified tone. And suddenly his body began to tremble.

"No, no, you've got the whole thing wrong," Claude said. He walked slowly across the room to get a cigarette from the box on his desk.

"That's what you said, isn't it?" Winston's voice cracked.

"No, I didn't. Now let's sit down and have a drink and forget it." Claude spoke with elaborate casualness, but he knew it sounded patronizing just the same. Maybe Winston *hadn't* stolen the spoon—after all, it belonged to Margaret, not to Claude. Maybe Winston was reacting with guilt because he had taken the other things, and he now knew that Claude realized it.

Those were Claude's last two thoughts—that he had sounded false and patronizing, that Winston might not have taken the baby spoon—before there was a quick step behind him, a brief whir of something moving fast through the air, and a shattering impact at the back of his head that caused his arms to fling up in a last empty, convulsive gesture.

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

More than once, even in the midst of griping, I have indicated what to these jaundiced eyes would seem my ideal four books for any given month. This lineup, high quality being understood, would consist of three fair-play detective novels and one roaring adventure in espionage. Such luck is hard to envision. Yet sometimes, incredibly, the miracle occurs; the scissors snip a rounded pattern; the old reprobate gets his wish.

Well, here it is again.

At first, in *Murder Without Icing*, by Emma Lathen (Simon and Schuster, $5.95), you may scarcely recognize the dignified old Sloan Guaranty Trust of Wall Street. As television sponsors of the New York Huskies, a professional hockey team now surging from cellar position towards the Stanley Cup, they have chosen well.

But problems trip up every move. Sabotage appears certain when a Nashville businessman, maneuvering to buy the franchise from Mrs. "Clemmie" Post and young Win Holland, is shot to death at La Guardia Airport. Then poison claims Billy Siragusa, their star, at the height of a crucial game. Once more Banker-Detective John Putnam Thatcher must sift through almost too much evidence for the grisly secret *au fond*.

Under the author's indulgent yet satiric eye we meet all our old friends: Charlie Trinkham, Everett Gabler, Brad Withers, Miss Corsa. We meet the Huskies, their fans, their coach, and their wives. All honor to Emma Lathen! Whether at ice hockey or at sound plotting, America's First Lady of Detection has well and truly scored again.

With Hercule Poirot proving that *Elephants Can Remember*, by Agatha Christie (Dodd, Mead, $6.95), Great Britain's First Lady of Detection offers her eighty-second novel in eighty-two years. For more than fifty of those years Poirot has united true hearts as well as detected murderers, his moustaches like a banner of chivalry.

Here he must investigate past mystery, when General Sir Alistair Ravenscroft and Lady Ravenscroft both died by violence

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on the cliff. Murder plus suicide, evidently; but which of them first killed the other? For the Ravenscrofts' daughter, who is also goddaughter of Detective Novelist Ariadne Oliver, now wants to get married.

Can Hercule Poirot, summoned by Mrs. Oliver, banish old shades of scandal? We know he can; we know he will. And Dame Agatha, infinitely various with stratagems, has lost none of her liveliness or her skill at bamboozling the unwary.

Though certain motivation for Ivon Baker's *Grave Doubt* (McKay-Washburn, $4.95) may also begin long ago, it cumulates today in several gruesome enigmas and strong emotional impact.

Young David Meynell, military archaeologist, has been employed to oversee the salvage of a Heinkel bomber downed in England during Hitler's War. One German airman's grave is empty; his body has disappeared. Another important witness, after surviving the Heinkel's fate for thirty years, dies in a mysterious car-crash while driving the wrong way.

The parish, whose lord of the manor is also its vicar, becomes dangerous ground both for David and for Anne Dowland, the American heroine. Investigation sharpens as Inspector Backus narrows the field; David, escaping a fiery trap, nails the right murderer by accusing the wrong one at the right time.

The author, an Anglican clergyman, can be realistic without obscenity or any descent to the crude. It's a pleasure to welcome this newcomer; *Grave Doubt* must rank with the best.

In *Assignment—Maltese Maiden*, by Edward S. Aarons (Fawcett, 75¢), the latest cloak-and-dagger broil carries Sam Durell from northern Africa to the island of Malta, and at quite literally breakneck pace.

General Dickinson McFee, Sam's C.I.A. boss, has been kidnaped by Mao's sinister, sadistic Madame Hung, as tireless at dirty work as Fu-Manchu before the era of ping-pong. General McFee must be rescued before he cracks. Parts played by Maltese Maiden Anne-Marie, by Deirdre Paget, and by Colonel Skoll of the Russian K.G.B., all fit neatly into explosive adventure with a twist at the end. First-rate Aarons, meaning top-grade Durell.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 382nd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. . .Perhaps the greatest compliment we can pay this new writer is to say that when you read his "first story" you will feel — no, you will be convinced — that you are there. . .

The author, R. R. Irvine, "studied anthropology and art in college, spent two years in the U.S. Army as a counterintelligence agent, then entered the field of journalism in the classical manner — by writing obituaries on a small daily newspaper." Since then he has worked in both radio and television news, as a writer, producer, editor, and director, and recently, as news director of the ABC Network station in Los Angeles (Eyewitness News). Now he is devoting full time to writing.

"Lobster Shift" is an excellent debut in print, and we look forward eagerly to Mr. Irvine's second story. . .

LOBSTER SHIFT

by R. R. IRVINE

There are simple rules for survival. Keep your mouth shut, do what you're told, pay your union dues on time, and keep your canary-eating grins down to a minimum. That's what it takes to be a successful television newsman, because it's just like any other business: politics and bootlicking get you ahead. And that's why my big mouth landed me on the lobster shift Monday, May 25th.

The date is stamped on my mind. It was the first day of my exile from the living, and the beginning of my nightmare.

I had trudged into the newsroom thirty minutes early, right into the middle of a screaming match between our anchorman, Al Aarons—we called him AA because of his drinking—and the Eleven O'Clock News producer, Jerry Green.

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"You idiot!" Aarons yelled, his anchorman's voice booming in the nearly deserted newsroom.

"You're drunk. You're drunk now and you were drunk on the air." Green turned to me as if I were a referee.

AA licked his lips and fired a slur of obscenity. His eyes glittered. On camera his glassy, ninety-proof peepers gave him a kind of charisma.

"Go home and sleep it off," Green advised.

AA answered with more elaborate obscenities. Then, as if victorious, he lurched out of the newsroom. We could hear him stumbling down the hall, careening from wall to wall.

"I'm through," Green said. "I can't take any more of this, Jeff."

"You say that every time he gets drunk."

"I know." A twitch pulled at Green's pinched lips. "But one of these days he's going to pass out in front of the camera, and that will be the end of me."

"Of him, you mean," I consoled.

"You've been in this business long enough to know better than that."

Yeah, I said to myself, you've got ten years in the business, Jeff Simmons, and only the lobster shift to show for it.

"If he ever blows it on camera," Green continued, "I'll get blamed for letting him drink. I'll be the one to get canned. Aarons will end up with a raise."

I nodded. Like I said, it's politics and pretty faces in the television news business.

"Why don't you go out and get yourself a drink," I suggested. In a way that suggestion was responsible for everything that happened later.

Green tossed his stopwatch into the nearest drawer, slammed the drawer shut with a tinkle of crystal, then swore at the top of his voice, pitiful by comparison to AA's parting blast, but still formidable in the narrow confines of the newsroom. He sucked in a deep breath. "Jeff, you're right. I'm going to get out of here early. Do you mind if I leave without clearing the wires?"

"No. I'll take care of it. You get going."

"Thanks, Jeff." He forced a smile, then practically ran from the newsroom.

I sighed after him. Eight hours to go on the lobster shift, and about half a mile of teletype copy to pull for Jerry Green.

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Of course, if he'd stayed I'd never have seen that first message. It had run at 11:23 P.M. Even at that I almost missed it. By the time I'd read through both United Press wires and the output from three Associated Press machines, the clatter of the wireroom had jangled my nerves and started a stabbing headache which turned me copy-blind.

I had just about decided to dump the National News Service copy and go down the hall for coffee and a couple of aspirins when my conscience caught up with me. I shrugged, clipped all twenty yards of the canary-yellow NNS paper, spun it into a tight roll, and carried it back to my already cluttered desk.

Since I had about a half hour of NNS ahead of me, I stocked up with two soggy cardboard cups of black coffee after swallowing the grimy aspirins I found loose in my pencil drawer.

Halfway through the second cup, with three feet of primary election analysis behind me, I ran across the first message.

HC
L548SR
IS FIRST STORY ACCEPTABLE? IF NOT, CONTACT SOONEST. URGENT.
M363FF

Not much at first glance, but the HC caught my attention. HC is National News Service code for our area, Los Angeles.

Ever since my big scoop last year ("What have you done lately?" Bud Murch, the news director, had asked when he sentenced me to the lobster shift) I always check the HCs closely. An innocent-looking HC had got me an exclusive interview, thirty seconds of 16-millimeter color film, with the Vice President between planes at International Airport.

So, with a deep sigh for past glories, I reread the HC URGENT, filed it in my head for future reference, and plowed on through the rest of the wire copy, soon rubbing my eyes with the full conviction that the coming California primary election was an obsession with NNS. They told me more, much more than I wanted to know about it. Besides, everyone knew the big race, the one for senator, was no contest Bobby Lundon was a cinch for the nomination and better than even money to knock off the incumbent, Wild Bill Bronson, in the November runoff.

Even old AA, who doubled as our political editor, had sadly

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predicted an end to the Bronson machine and to the free booze that Bronson sent him every month. Bronson's administration had been hit hard by one scandal after another in the past year. Even so, Wild Bill was still popular, and nobody but Bobby Lundon could beat him.

The next day, Tuesday, the answer came in on my shift, at 12:20 A.M.

JN
M363FF
MONEY UNACCEPTABLE. STORY OFF IF NOT FORTHCOMING.
L548SR

That snapped me to attention. JN was code for Las Vegas, and I always think of Vegas in terms of money.

In the news business it's rare to pay for a story. You only put out for the big ones—I mean the really big ones—and then only as a last resort.

So with a smile, figuring we were about to get a free ride on an NNS scoop, I left a note asking Jerry Green to save the early NNS copy for me. I sure as hell didn't want to miss the next message if it happened not to come through on my shift.

I spent the rest of the early hours Tuesday drinking coffee and trying to work on my novel—yes, The Great American Novel. But I kept wondering what kind of story NNS—known for its low pay and cheap attitude—would pay big money for. By the time my shift ended at eight o'clock, I had accomplished little if anything, but then the lobster man wasn't expected to do very much. Actually, he's only there in case of a big news story, like a plane crash. Then he calls a film crew and gets a pat on the back from the boss, the guy who assigned him to the lobster shift in the first place.

Some people never can adjust to lobster-shift hours. That's why they figure you'll end up quitting and save them the trouble of trying to fire you and maybe touch off a union grievance.

I'm too damned obstinate to quit, and smart enough to know all the lobster man really has to do is stay awake, weed through the wires for bulletins, and talk to every crank who calls in. It's a newsroom rule: always talk to the cranks—maybe you'll get a big story one day. But I've never known anyone to get anything that

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way.

Once, maybe twice a year, the lobster man earns his salary by getting film of a plane crash or some other equally visual disaster.

Friday morning at 4:22 I thought I had earned my keep for the year.

HC
L548SR
WE UP THE ANTE 10-THOUSAND
M363FF

Now, that's big money. Too big to be anything short of exclusive rights to World War Three.

I wrote the transmission numbers down in my notebook, then decided I couldn't just sit there waiting for it to break. Without thinking it through I grabbed the phone and called the downtown office of NNS.

Their lobster man came on with a tired drinker's voice. "Williams, National News Service."

"This is Jeff Simmons at Channel Three."

"Good for you," he croaked. He rattled when he spoke, as though from a hundred cigarettes a day.

I plunged in. "I've been watching those messages between LA and Vegas and I'd like to know what's up?" As soon as the question came out I knew it was a mistake. Play it cool, I told myself.

"What messages?" He sounded annoyed.

"Hell, you're talking to a pro, you know." I lost my cool. "I'm talking about the messages offering ten thousand dollars for a story."

"You must be crazy. National wouldn't pay that kind of money for the Armageddon."

My cool boiled. "Look, I can read. What are you trying to pull?"

"Hey, you're serious, aren't you? Well, I still don't know what you're talking about."

"Look at your wire for 4:22. What do you see?" I asked.

"Just a minute." A chair scraped, accompanied by a tired grunt. A couple of minutes later he said, "It's probably about something else altogether. It doesn't say anything about money. Hell, for that matter it could even be a bet—though that's strictly

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against the rules—sent by one of our teletype operators to someone in Vegas."

"Unh-unh. That message is from Vegas to LA."

"Yeah, you're right," he said. "Still, I'm just the nightman. You'd better call the boss later this morning."

I agreed. It would just stir up the man's imagination to question him further.

I hung up and thought about $10,000.

Since the weekend started for me at eight A.M., I typed a long note to Jerry Green outlining what I knew so far and suggesting that he contact the head of NNS. Maybe, as long as Channel Three was a paying subscriber to their news service, they would let us in on their scoop.

Jerry Green was waiting for me when I ambled into the newsroom at 12:05 Monday morning. He was perched on my desk like a quarrelsome towhee, his dangling feet thumping nervously against my typewriter stand.

"You're late," he announced.

"Either you're waiting for me," I quipped, "or you're twelve hours early for work."

"You and your big nose," he said.

"It's a nice nose," I said, fingering my snout lovingly.

"You should never stick it in where it belongs."

I grinned. "There's something wrong with the way you said that."

"I'm just quoting the law of survival in the news business."

"You're not that cynical," I said. "Not yet anyway."

"It's that story of yours. It's been bothering me all weekend. I kept dreaming about it."

"The messages, you mean?"

"Yes. National News Service claims there's nothing to them."

"What about the money?" I asked.

"They say it wasn't ten thousand dollars, but an order for a ten-thousand-word feature story on gambling in Las Vegas."

"Since when has a wire service run ten-thousand-word feature stories?"

Green waved his hands helplessly.

"Did you talk to the guy who sent the messages?" I said.

"No. I never got past the editor. Besides, how would I know who sent them?"

"Each teletype operator has a code number he signs his

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transmissions with."

"That's right. I'd forgotten about that," Green said. He shook his head in self-disgust.

I still couldn't figure why he'd come in to see me in the middle of the night. "Is that all you got, Jerry?"

He nodded. "That's it, Jeff."

"Why this special visit then? You could have left me a note."

Green's loud sigh ended in a shrug. "I don't know. I just don't trust NNS. I never have."

I studied Green's pinched face. The hair on the back of my neck prickled to attention; instinct means survival in the news business. With a palms-up gesture I urged him to continue.

"I don't like the way they're handling the election for one thing," Green said.

"What do you mean, Jerry?"

"Hell, you know as well as I do that they're slanting everything against Bobby Lundon. They're backing Bronson."

"I hadn't noticed they were slanting it."

"Bronson's chief aide is a major stockholder in NNS, has been for the past year or so. I thought you knew that."

"No." I shook my head. "Still—"

"Don't take my word for it," Green snapped. "Read the wires for yourself tonight and see what I mean."

It was my turn to sigh. "Okay."

He hopped down from his perch. "I'm going home and try to get some sleep. I hope I don't dream about you and your story again." He started down the hall, then came back. "Hey, Jeff, leave me a note if you get anything more on this, will you?" He waved goodbye a second time.

I hung up my coat, stalled over a cup of tepid coffee, groaning out loud when I thought of what was ahead of me that morning. I wasn't disappointed either. The wire services had produced a good hundred yards of copy in honor of election eve—everything from personal portraits, including the inevitable family dog, to complete election schedules for the candidates. Bronson was headquartered at the Hilton; Lundon had chosen the less pretentious Sheraton.

When I finally reached the NNS copy I saw what Jerry Green had been talking about. The stories about Bronson used phrases like, "Bronson declared," "Bronson stated firmly," or "Bronson affirmed," while the Lundon copy read, "Lundon alleged" or

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"Lundon claimed." It was too subtle to influence an election, but it galled me just the same.

As I was about to dump NNS in the circular file, I spotted a byline by an old friend, Irv Scott, who had worked with me on my first newspaper. I called him at home at 4:30 in the morning.

"Who," I asked him when he had calmed down, "is M363FF in Las Vegas and who is L548SR in Los Angeles?"

"You mean you want to know tonight?" he asked.

"Sure. It's morning already and I'm at work."

A stream of obscenities cleared the wax out of my ear. "I'll call you back," he grumbled finally.

At 4:55 I found another message.

HC
L548SR
HALF PAYMENT IN ADVANCE NOW AT PRE-ARRANGED LOCATION. REMAINDER UPON COMPLETION. SUGGEST SHERATON LOCATION.
M363FF

Five minutes later Irv Scott called back.

"What's all this about?" he asked, now fully awake, his newsman's instinct working.

I leveled with him.

"That's strange," he said. "We don't have any operators with those code numbers."

"Are you sure, Irv?"

"Well, I talked to our night man and he checked the transmission list. Half the stuff is run through a computer these days. Maybe it was just a mispunched number."

"Probably," I said. It had to be a very big story, I thought, if they weren't even letting their own people in on it. "Hell, maybe I got the numbers wrong," I lied. There didn't seem to be any reason to drag Scott in any further.

"Are you telling me everything?" Scott's voice sounded guarded.

"Yeah. You know as much as I do."

"Well, keep in touch," he said.

Forty minutes later the final message came through.

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JN
M363FF
SHERATON IDEAL. THIS WILL BE LAST TRANSMISSION.
SEND FINAL PAYMENT UPON COMPLETION.
L548SR

I stapled the last two messages together and left them in Jerry Green's mailbox.

When I walked into the newsroom shortly before midnight the next day, people were crammed everywhere. Channel Three's live election coverage was in full swing and would continue right up until the results were official.

I poked in my cluttered mailbox and found a message from Irv Scott. He'd got the break of a lifetime and had been transferred to the NNS bureau in Washington, D.C. But I didn't have time to think about what I was reading then. The newsroom's organized insanity blotted out everything else.

Jerry Green, surrounded by writers and copy boys who shuffled nervously waiting to run bulletins from the newsroom to the broadcast studio, waved me over. Every telephone was in use; everyone seemed to be yelling at once. Jerry and I conversed at a shout.

"You get anything else?" he asked.

"I think more than I bargained for," I murmured.

"What?" he yelled.

"No, nothing," I said. "But I plan to do some more checking when things quiet down around here." My eyes swept around the frenzied newsroom.

"We'll be out of your way pretty soon. Lundon's got it locked up. His victory speech is due in about ten minutes."

I nodded and then strolled over to an empty desk in the corner. The lobster man never has much to do election night, just clean up the mess after everyone else has gone home.

Feet up, coffee at my elbow, I settled back to watch the bank of big color-TV sets, each monitoring one of our competitors. The volume on Channel Three had been cranked wide open. You couldn't actually hear the words, but you could get the drift of things.

Lundon was on his way to the podium to accept the nomination.

I didn't really hear the shot, but I could tell something was

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wrong immediately. On the screen people moved wildly and screamed. In the newsroom there was stunned silence as veterans and copy boys alike gaped at the row of flickering screens; each showed Lundon close-up, slumped over the podium, blood spilling from his ear.

Over the picture Al Aarons' voice wavered: "The scene at the Sheraton is total chaos—"

The word screamed in my brain, echoing: "SHERATON. . .SHERATON."

The messages on NNS had been arrangements for an assassination. But I had been too stupid to see it. You're nuts, I told myself. Still, phones can be tapped, letters opened, conversations overheard. The safest way just might be right out in the open where no one would pay any attention to them—no one, that is, but a disgruntled lobster man looking for a way to get back on the day shift.

I squinted across the newsroom, now just beginning to come back to life, and caught Green's eye. His lips were pressed into a grim white line, his head canted to one side. He, too, had guessed the meaning of the messages.

I didn't have time to talk with him until eight o'clock that morning. By then Lundon was dead and a single suspect was in custody. The press knew nothing about the suspect yet, not even his name.

Jerry Green and I knew he was part of a conspiracy.

"Jerry," I said, "I think we'd better save those messages."

He nodded. "They're in your mailbox. I put them there after I read them."

"That's funny. I didn't notice them when I came in."

They weren't in my mailbox.

"Maybe they fell out and were swept up," he suggested.

"Maybe." I shook my head. Neither of us believed it; we looked around the newsroom suspiciously.

I cornered the office secretary. "Has anyone been here from NNS in the last few hours?"

"Not this morning," she said. "But there was somebody last night. A man came to fix the machine. It went on the blink about eleven o'clock."

Green stared at me helplessly.

At the arraignment and subsequent press conference District Attorney John Rasdale said, "Our investigation indicates that this

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was the act of a single individual, a man named Edgar Young."

I saw his statement after the fact when Green ran the 16-millimeter film of the press conference for me.

"We just can't sit on our hands and forget about it," I said. "We've got to do something."

"What? This is too big for us."

"Jerry, we're going to the D.A."

"Not me," said Green. "Bronson is a cinch for senator now. I don't want to get involved in politics."

"Politics! This is murder."

"Look, Jeff, you're already on the lobster shift. You don't have anything to lose. But it's taken me a long time to make producer."

"You should never have left the union."

"Leave me out of it," he said.

"Okay, Jerry. Okay." I waved my hands in disgust. "I'll go it alone."

The D.A. tried to intimidate me. He greeted me in a trout-gray suit and rainbow tie and shook hands like a politician, with a steady pressure to one side as if I were taking up too much of his time.

I told him about the messages.

Over the top of steel-rimmed glasses he gave me the fish-eye, shook his head doubtfully, then picked up the phone and called Wild Bill Bronson's special aide, the one who owned most of National News Service. The D.A. repeated my accusation, nodded to something I couldn't hear, and hung up quickly.

"Well," Rasdale said, swinging his big leather desk chair back in my direction, "I hope you're not trying to say Bill Bronson is somehow mixed up in this?"

"You're damn right I am," I snapped. Me and my big mouth. I'd forgotten Rasdale wanted to run for governor in two years and would need Bronson's help for that.

When he clicked his tongue derisively I got mad. "Look, I'm telling you there was a conspiracy to kill Lundon. Edgar Young may have been one of them, I don't know, but he's a small fish."

"We have witnesses who saw him shoot Lundon. It was even on television."

"I know."

"Anyone else believe your story?" the D.A. asked.

"You're damn right. Jerry Green, who produces the Eleven O'Clock News for Channel Three."

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"Why isn't he here?" asked Rasdale.

"He doesn't want to get involved."

The next day they fired Jerry Green—two weeks' pay in lieu of notice and out the door. They couldn't touch me because of the union. Green left town the same day.

It was a bigger conspiracy than I thought.

The prosecution didn't want me for a witness, so I told my story to Young's attorney, a high-powered lawyer from Northern California who had been attracted by the publicity.

I don't think he believed me—at least, he never said so—but he put me on the stand just the same.

Channel Three didn't like the whole thing either; but Murch talked with me the day before I was scheduled to testify. "Simmons," he warned, "politics and news don't mix."

But what could he do? He didn't have anything worse than the lobster shift to threaten me with. (The newswriters' union is a force to be reckoned with in Los Angeles.)

I told Murch just that. Me, the big mouth again.

My testimony shook the jury momentarily. Everyone in court could see that, including the prosecution. All the newsmen covering the trial began to fidget, waiting to see what the Deputy D.A., a man in line for promotion to the top spot if and when Rasdale made governor, would try against me.

He countered with Murch. He was Channel Three's news director, the Deputy D.A. pointed out, a veteran journalist, highly respected in his profession.

"Mr. Murch," he began, "did you know about these so-called messages on National News Service?"

"No, I did not." Murch pronounced each word carefully, emphatically.

"As news director would you normally be informed about such things?"

"I certainly would. That is, if my people were doing their job."

"I take it that you mean it is policy at Channel Three to keep the news director informed about all major stories?"

"Yes, I do," Murch answered.

"Did Mr. Simmons so inform you?" The Deputy D.A. was laying it on pretty thick.

"No, he did not," Murch said.

"What kind of newsman," the Deputy D.A. asked, "do you consider Mr. Simmons to be?"

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"He's on the lobster shift," Murch said. "That's where we put people who aren't good enough for the daytime operation."

Or who don't kiss your feet, I thought.

But that did it—it sunk my testimony.

However, the Deputy D.A. didn't take any chances. He called the editor of National News Service to the stand. Without a qualm the man said, "There were a couple of messages on the wire about a feature story on gambling." He produced twenty feet of yellow paper. "Here's a copy of it." He shrugged elaborately

There was no way I could prove him a liar.

The trial dragged on through the first week of September. Even without my credibility, Edgar Young got off with diminished capacity and was sent to a state mental hospital.

I, of course, had been given a stiffer sentence—the lobster shift without a hope of parole.

With the November election only three weeks away Wild Bill Bronson is already talking victory. His press aides have leaked stories that he is line for the Vice Presidency, or even the *big job* in two more years.

The lobster shift seems more lonely than ever. By the time I get in, the new Eleven O'Clock producer is always gone, so I never see anyone except an occasional janitor.

I feel vulnerable, alone there in the newsroom from midnight to eight, knowing they are out to get me.

So every morning I tell myself, fingers crossed, that I'm not really worth the trouble. Why kill me? I'm too small potatoes to be a threat. But with a conspiracy that may even involve the *big job* itself, the stakes are fantastic, so no threat is too small. And I have a reputation for a big mouth.

A heart attack in the newsroom wouldn't be hard to fake. They'd find me in the morning at the end of the lobster shift. NNS would report it that way, and even follow it up with a brief obit; they do that for every dead newsman.

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a *NEW* "historical" by

THEODORE MATHIESON

Here is the third in the new series of "historicals." The first two "revealed hitherto unknown events in the lives of world-famous people" — the first, in the literary career of F. Scott Fitzgerald, and the second, in the theatrical career of John Barrymore.

The third is a "previously unrecorded event" in the life of another world-famous writer, Thomas Wolfe, author of LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL. *As the narrator says, the story is "by classic definition, a mystery, containing suspects and hidden motives." And a bizarre and fascinating mystery it is — about "the big Gorgooby"...*

THOMAS WOLFE AND THE TOMBSTONE MYSTERY

by THEODORE MATHIESON

In the spring of 1941, three years after Thomas Wolfe's death, I addressed the Literati Club in Denver on the subject "The Artist's Conscience," and said that Wolfe had a conscience as deep as the Grand Canyon. My audience stirred rebelliously. The next day a reviewer on the *Denver Post* wrote: "Mr. Henry Catherwood, distinguished professor of humanities and Hispanic American Literature at Denver College, former president of the Literati Club, as well as sometime friend of Thomas Wolfe, should know better than to try to foist his own prejudicial judgment of his friend on those of us who, although we know and admire Mr. Wolfe's books, recognize that as an artist Mr. Wolfe was as conscienceless as a juggernaut scything the wheatfield of his experience, and sparing neither mother nor father, brother nor

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sister, partner nor friend, from his merciless dissection on the printed page."

For days after my talk, friends and colleagues phoned to inquire if I had really meant that Thomas Wolfe had a *conscience*. Hadn't I, for heaven's sake, read *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and the River?* Wolfe, they reminded me, had been notoriously ruthless, not only in depicting the frailties of his family and friends, but in turning his back, in the end, on all those who had befriended or loved him, from his mentor at Harvard, George Pierce Baker, to the one man responsible for his literary emergence, his editor and friend, Maxwell Perkins.

"Wolfe drew from life," I told them, "as any artist does. But having a superior brand of vision he drew more copiously and exalted his characters above the mundane, endowing them with significance. For this favor his so-called 'victims' should feel repaid since, after all, without free access to his magnificent memory of life experience, Wolfe could not have functioned as an artist."

"We accept all that," Russell Hayden, my friend and current president of the Literati Club, said impatiently over lunch in the faculty dining room. "But for God's sake, Henry, why insist that Wolfe had a conscience? To my knowledge he never showed any, and the people he used—yes, used—couldn't soar to his empyrean heights to see themselves as he saw them; any more than a frog, being vivisected, can appreciate the contribution he's making to science. All that Wolfe's poor human victims could do was to suffer. Or get angry. Or try to sue him. And when they did, he cursed their plebian souls. Yet you insist the man had a conscience."

"He did. Under the arrogant artist was as kind and sensitive a soul as you could imagine. And in his final illness the humanity of the man emerged triumphant. He was reconciled with Perkins and the others at the end, you know."

"That's right. You were with him at the end, weren't you?"

"No, I wasn't. He became ill three days after I left him in Portland, Oregon. But just before that I took that whirlwind trip with him through seven states."

"Something happened then?"

"He saw the Big Gorgooby, for one thing."

"The Big Gorgooby?"

"And for another, he received the stone tablets. You know that Wolfe's father was a cutter of tombstones, but did

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you know that Tom's grandfather and great-grandfather predicted the date and hour of their deaths?"

"No, I didn't."

"Well, keep those facts in mind, because they have everything to do with the revelation—to me—of Tom's artistic conscience."

Hayden's eyes brightened.

"Henry, I made this luncheon date hoping you had something special to tell us. *Januis clausis?*"

"*Januis clausis.*"

"And a special meeting, I hope."

"If you wish."

Twelve members of the Literati Club met at Hayden's home the following Thursday, and I must admit I had never been faced by a more eager and attentive audience.

I should explain that *januis clausis* meant more, in our club, than "behind closed doors." It meant that if a member wished to throw special light on the life or work of a favorite author—be it Stevenson, Thoreau, or Edwin Corle—he could, by using the implements of insight and imagination, weave a tale that worked to that end, thereby testing his ability to establish credulity, or suspension of judgment; for his listeners were stern and intelligent critics—teachers, lawyers, writers, even a banker—the sole requirement for membership in our club being the love of books.

I could, then, according to the rules, make up a story, or I could tell the truth—the latter, if possible, entailing more careful handling to assure its acceptance. In either case I was not obliged to tell my listeners whether I spoke truth or fiction, although the narrator usually did.

"It's a curious story," I told them, "involving death and guilt, and, perhaps more than anything, the revelation of a man's soul. It is also, by classic definition, a mystery, containing suspects and hidden motives."

I began by telling them of my first meeting with Tom Wolfe in 1935, three years before his death, when he attended a writer's conference in Denver and I submitted some manuscripts from my Creative Writing Class for his judgment. As it turned out, he selected three of them for a reading at the Scribner editorial office, and one of them eventually saw print. But meanwhile we worked together and learned we had something in common. Both Southerners, we deplored the smug provinciality of the South; we both loved German

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music and literature, we both distrusted Hitler, and we shared a taste for the ichor of the juniper berry.

Wolfe, at that time, had begun to put weight on his huge frame, and as he shambled across campus with students clustering disciplelike around him, he looked like the friendly giant among pygmies. He was always a sloppy dresser, and awkward in social manners—F. Scott Fitzgerald, who met him in Paris, somewhere described him as uncouth after having seen him stir his drink with his long middle finger; and when Tom spoke, ideas so crowded themselves for expression that he often stuttered and sprayed you as he talked. But for all that he was a sensitive instrument, geared to answer your secret thoughts as if you'd uttered them—a challenging and delightful companion who never let you escape an argument with a cliché.

When I saw him again, three years later, he'd gained even more weight, which made him look middle-aged, although he was no older than I, in mid-thirties, and his face had an unhealthy pallor.

On his first night in Denver we went out on the town together with a married couple, friends of Tom's, whom we lost somewhere along the way. Then Tom got the idea he would like to see the mountains, so we jumped in my car and headed west.

Restless and keyed up, he did all the talking. Since I'd last seen him he had switched publishers from Scribners to Harpers, had made another trip to Germany and came away disturbed by his first-hand view of anti-Semitism, and had completed a novella about a degenerate family. As the result of its publication he'd been sued by a Kentucky family who claimed that he had "drawn them crazy" in it. The suit had been settled out of court, but Tom said he couldn't get it out of his mind.

"I had to get away from the East," he said. "Everything was closing in on me. Couldn't write, and was having morbid thoughts, you know? I asked my brother Fred, just before I left: 'Do you think I'm going to die?' He laughed and said, 'Sure, we're all going to die some day.' But I don't know. I feel I've got to hurry, somehow, to get everything finished." He glanced back along the dark road at the headlights behind us.

"You know, Henry, all I ever wanted to be was a pioneer of the spirit, to lift some of the mystery surrounding life and death. I never wanted to hurt

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anybody. I couldn't help that part of it, any more than I could keep myself from writing. You understand?" He looked back again.

"Of course. You think someone's following us?"

"The damnedest thing, yes, ever since I left New York. Maybe it was because I got *this* in the mail—just before I left."

He handed me a folded piece of paper, and I was not so drunk that I didn't take care to park on the shoulder of the mountain road before I read it in the light from the dashboard.

"You unfeeling monster," it read, without salutation. "You think that a few thousand dollars will replace my sister's life? You think your so-called 'genius' justifies that? I am just behind you now, wherever you go and when you least expect it—look homeward, angel!

Hank Daggett"

"Who's Daggett?" I asked.

"One of that Kentucky family, I guess. I never met him; the father brought the suit. But I guess, in movie parlance, 'he's out to get me'."

"What happened to the sister?"

"No, you don't. I came West to forget all that. Besides, I think it's a bluff." He caught himself looking in the rear-view mirror, laughed, and tipped the gin bottle again.

We got to some kind of lookout on Bald Mountain and stood watching the lights of Denver winking far out on the plain.

"Wonderful country, those prairies," Tom said. "Like a big fat hog—flat, fat, green, and fertile. But we need mountain people, too, and sea people. I think they feel harder, deeper, than prairie people. Come with me, Henry."

"Where?"

"To the West Coast. I've got an invitation to make a quick trip of twelve national parks in two weeks. I'd like to have you along. I find you calming to be with."

"It's the gin."

"Besides, maybe you could keep this angel from going home again."

"Well," I said, aware of the urgency behind his banter, "it *is* vacation time."

He gave me a bear hug and we went unsteadily back to the car, Tom whistling "Heigh-ho" out of tune.

We drove on to Leadville that night, where we stayed in a motel, and the next day we picked up our drinking where we had left off, although I held back some, because I had to drive. Tom, on the other hand, was almost moribund, although nothing could dam his spate of speech, so that as we headed

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back to Denver, passing through the outskirts of Leadville, he grabbed my arm and told me to stop.

"You see that?" he demanded, pointing across the highway to an area in front of a shop where there were steles and rectangles of granite and marble. "My father was a cutter of tombstones, and how the sight of all that stone merchandise carries me back to the days of my Old Kentucky Home!"

We returned to Denver, where I packed a suitcase, and we caught the Burlington Zephyr to the West Coast. For a few days we stayed in Portland, and then went to Seattle, where Tom looked up his Westall kin, who had come there in the 1890's. By the middle of June we were back in Portland again, and Tom introduced me to Ron Hadley, the owner-manager of a large travel bureau who wanted to demonstrate the feasibility of a tour of twelve national parks in two weeks. He invited me along.

"Personally, I think it's madness," Tom told me, "but when Hadley sent me an invitation I couldn't resist."

We were to start on the 21st. On the night of the 20th we returned to our hotel after a day of sightseeing to find that a small but heavy packet had arrived in the mail for Tom.

"Who would be sending me a present from Denver?" Tom asked, studying the postmark. "And there's no return address."

I left Tom to open his package while I bathed and shaved, and when I returned he was sitting by the window and staring down at the busy Portland traffic.

"See what Santa Claus sent," he said, holding up a flat rectangular stone, polished on one side, on which was carved the following:

THOMAS WOLFE
Born October 3, 1900
Died

"Who would do a thing like that?" I asked.

"Who else but Daggett? He must have known my father was a stonecutter, and that my grandfather Westall broke with the Presbyterian Church over predestination. My grandfather predicted the hour of his death, as did his father before him. In the words of Henry James, Daggett's little memento is a perfect 'turn of the screw'."

"The stonecutter in Leadville!" I exclaimed. "Do you remember, Tom, we stopped in front of his shop?"

Tom rubbed his forehead.

"I don't even remember Leadville."

"This Daggett must have followed and seen us, which

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gave him the idea. Can't be coincidence. Get in touch with the police, Tom. You don't have to suffer this harassment."

But Tom rejected my suggestion with such vehemence I began to suspect that, somehow, Daggett's persecution was becoming a hair shirt that he was loathe to remove.

We left Portland the following morning with Ron Hadley driving his cream-white Ford sedan and, beside him, a fourth passenger, David Melden, a young reporter on the Portland *Oregonian*. And while Tom and I sat wedged in the back—for my friend took up a lot of room—Melden chatted amiably, pointing out Mounts Hood and Jefferson, and filling us in on the pioneer background of the sometimes harsh but beautiful land that lies east of the Cascades.

Somewhere between Bend and the turnoff to Crater Lake, Melden stopped talking in mid-sentence and turned to Hadley.

"Ron, that blue Buick has been following off and on ever since Portland."

"I know," Hadley said, then raised his voice to Tom and me. "I've got a rival, Bill Bullock, who's threatened to make the tour himself. Could be him."

"Don't you recognize him?" Tom asked.

"Can't say I do, but Dave's right. Whoever it is, is following us."

By the time we reached Crater Lake, our first night's stop, the Buick was nowhere in sight; but later, when we heard a car drive up outside our hotel window, Tom snapped out the lights and drew apart the drapes.

"It's the Buick," he said, and rushed out the door before I could stop him. By the time I got on a coat and followed, he stood, hands on hips, looking into the darkness. The Buick was gone.

"A guy stepped out, a tall guy, with black glasses," Tom said. "He took one look at me, then got back in and drove away. I couldn't see the other man clearly, but I have a hunch one of them was Daggett."

Tom received the second stone at Yosemite Lodge, where he had arranged to have his mail forwarded and where we ran into a lot of young people who, as Tom wrote later, "were necking, dancing, kissing, feeling, and embracing in the great darkness of the redwood trees." And in this saturnalia Tom and I read the second epitaph:

THOMAS WOLFE
Born October 3, 1900
Died September 15,

"Come with me," Tom said. and carrying both stones under

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his arm he led us out of the lodge and along paths where other pairs were smooching, to the misty bridge that spanned the stream from Bridal Veil Falls.

"No, on second thought," he said, on the point of tossing one of the stones into the boiling cateract, "this is the wrong place. Not here. I'll know where."

"The police—" I said again.

"No. Not until Daggett puts in the *year*. That'll be time enough."

Meanwhile, with the rigid need for early starts and late arrivals, Tom was finding it harder and harder to get out of bed in the mornings. It also occurred to me that he might be seeking some kind of sanctuary in sleep, for I knew the business of the tombstones was worrying him, and he rarely relaxed his watchfulness of the road behind us as we traveled.

"We flee now across the desert," Tom said as we sped across the burning hills of the Mojave to Needles and the Colorado River. But there was no sign of the Buick.

On through Arizona, in the moonlight, we raced to the Grand Canyon, and we had no sooner taken our luggage into the lodge than Tom dug out the stones again and we went out to the observation point, which at that late hour was deserted.

"This is it," Tom said. "This is the Big Gorgooby."

"Gorgooby?"

"Never heard the word myself, before. But it's what this place looks like to me—Old Gorgooby. Big Gorgooby. Look down, Henry, at that unfathomable dark. It's like standing on the very edge of hell, here, catching a glimmer of starlight in the abyss. Can you see it—the river? Like the shine of a man's conscience in the hidden depths of himself, which he can sometimes barely see, but he knows it must be there, if he is to be *some kind* of good man. Oh, but the abyss, the abyss that swallows the light—!"

And with something like a sob he hurled the two stones into the chasm. We stood listening for the sound of crashing, but heard nothing but the thin stream of wind that forever whispers at the canyon's edge. Then Tom sank down on a stone bench, and I sat beside him, and he was silent for so long I thought he had fallen asleep.

"The girl's name was Helen," he said finally. "Helen Daggett. She was going to New York University, majoring in English and working for her M.A., and one day about three years ago she showed up at my apartment

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and told me I was her thesis, and would I cooperate? We became quite good friends. She had a refreshing quality of candor and originality and could flash out with quite unexpected observations. She said once, 'Tom, everything about you begins with a "g." You have a gargantuan appetite, you're gay, you're grim, and when you talk you're a gushing waterfall. You're also great.'

"On the other hand, she had a morbid streak, was inclined to hypochondria, and her eyes had the look of an 'old soul,' as if she remembered other lifetimes, other places. She'd never been to Germany, for instance, and yet she described Goethe's home, which I knew first-hand, as if she'd been there. When I asked her what her sources were, she laughed and said that she'd read the usual stuff, but in dreams she had gleaned details she had not read. I believed her. Her descriptions were *intimate*. She told me her mother and father were psychic, and told me tales of their experiences that made my hair rise. I said I wanted to meet them.

"'Oh, Tom,' she said, 'I don't think you'd like them. They're strange, and I was glad to get away from home. The only one in my family who's normal is my brother Hank—my half brother, that is. Mother was married before. But last time I heard, years ago, he was in Mexico on a scholarship. He visited us only twice, both times when I was a little girl. But there was always something special between us. Hank never liked my father, and after a while he didn't even write any more. No, you don't want to meet my family, Tom.'

"But I did, and at my insistence she finally agreed to drive me to Kentucky for a visit. We stayed one night with her parents. Her father, who had lost one lung from pneumonia, had a part-time job in the railroad office and spent the rest of the time lying around the house, drinking corn whiskey and reading Communist tracts. He was a hater. He hated everything America had to offer, including the opportunities of education it offered his daughter. He hated the colleges which, he said, were propaganda factories for the capitalist system.

"He hated writers like me, who did not produce for the state and thus were parasites of the system. The only value of art, he said, was its social utility. He described his 'visions'—which came at night—of the blood bath that would precede the reconstruction of American society along Com-

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munist lines, and his powers of description were so considerable that I recognized in him an artist gone sour.

"Helen's mother, on the other hand, was a quiet soul, but in her own way quite as terrible. I think once she might have been a sweet person, but living with that man had turned her in on herself, so she'd become like a tidal pool, shrinking inward from the edges, until sooner or later there would be nothing left of her but salty residue. But she still loved her daughter, and many of the mother's visions, gleaned from trances, had to do with Helen's welfare. At the dinner table she pointed at the poor girl and said, 'You must have nothing further to do with Mr. Wolfe! If you do, I see disaster for you!'

"Well, Helen and I came away pretty upset. We spoke little all the way back to New York, and after that we saw less and less of each other, until I forgot about her.

"Meanwhile I'd written that novella, using old Daggett as my protagonist, and including Mrs. Daggett and Helen. I swear I was not aware I had done her an injustice. I simply wrote what came, showing how hatred for one's self can destroy others. I was shocked, just after publication, when old Daggett started a lawsuit. And then, a few weeks later, I read that Helen had committed suicide in her New York apartment.

"I felt responsible. I looked into her death and learned she was having an affair with a member of the faculty at the University, a married man, and had left a note for him after she'd taken the sleeping pills. I actually went to her apartment and got the landlady to let me in. And on the table beside her bed lay a copy of my novella, where she had set it down, apparently, open to the page which described her. I tell you, Henry, I've never minded people I've used in my stories maligning me, hating me. Sooner or later they get over it. But *this*—I didn't mean to do the little girl any harm!"

"And perhaps you didn't," I said, deeply moved. "The girl was having a love affair with a married man. That would have been enough."

"If only I were sure."

He rose, moved to the parapet overlooking the dark abyss, and leaned over it, until I was afraid he would lose his balance. Tom was shivering.

"I'll never know," he whispered. "Never—in this world."

We returned to Portland, having, in two weeks, made a huge pear-shaped trip through seven states and visited Yellow-

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stone, Glacier National Park, Grand Coulee Dam, and Mount Rainier—a distance of 4,662 miles. Around midway Tom had joined the reporter to convince Hadley that the logistics of such a tour were utter madness, and the tourmaster, red-eyed and with his muscles cramped from having done most of the driving, agreed without argument.

"I guess my competitor Bullock decided the same thing a long time ago," he said. "We haven't seen hide nor hair of him since Crater Lake."

And then, after a final supper together, we left our host and the reporter, went to our hotel, and found the third stone waiting. It read:

THOMAS WOLFE
Born October 3, 1900
Died September 15, 1938

"Today's July first," Tom said. "That gives me two and a half months to live, anyhow."

"And now it's time to call the police."

"No, I don't want to do that."

"Don't be a fool, Tom. This is a clear threat against your life."

"I don't know why—I—just—don't—want—to."

The next day Tom took a bus to Seattle and I took the Daylight out of Portland. I never saw him again, and I didn't hear of his death until I read it in the newspapers.

When I reached this point in my story, the members of the Literati Club were leaning forward in their chairs.

"Well, I think you're making your point," my friend Hayden, the president, said. "But the story can't be finished!"

"I don't believe I remember just how Wolfe died," said another member. "What happened?"

"When Tom reached Seattle and got good news from Harpers about his new unfinished novel, he felt so jaunty he decided to go up to Vancouver on the coastal steamer, Kathleen. Actually, he was tense and restless from the two-week journey and more fatigued than he realized. They stopped for a night at Victoria, and the next day Tom met a man on deck who offered him a drink from his bottle of whiskey. As Tom wrote later, the man was a 'shivering wreck,' infected with influenza or worse. And from him, or from standing in the chill sea wind, Tom caught a cold.

"The cold developed into pneumonia. He recovered from that, but the disease developed complications. Early in his life Tom had contracted tuberculosis and the lung had healed,

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but the encapsulated lesion had been ruptured by the pneumonia. The tubercle bacilli, entering the bloodstream, had been carried to Tom's brain, and he was doomed. His family had taken him back to a Baltimore hospital to try to save him, but he was past help. He died at 6:30 in the morning on September 15, 1938."

"The date on the stone!" Hayden cried.

"That should explain," I said, "who sent the stones."

The club members stared at me without understanding.

"Tom Wolfe died of natural causes," I continued. "Who in all the world could be expected to predict the date of his death, as his grandfather and great-grandfather had done before him? *Who but Tom Wolfe himself?*"

"You mean *he* had the stones cut and sent to him?"

"I told you we stopped outside Leadville at the stonecutter's. Tom insisted on going in. He must have told the cutter exactly what to carve on the stones, and where to send them."

"And he didn't remember doing it?" Hayden asked.

"I don't think so. Not only because he was dead-drunk most of the time, but because he wanted to salve his conscience by *suffering*, and wouldn't *let* himself remember."

"But you were with him, Henry," Hayden cried. "You must have known. And you didn't say a word to ease his anxiety?"

"I suspected he didn't want me to. He had something to work out within himself. I think I helped him to expiate his guilt about Helen."

"But what about Daggett?" a member asked. "What happened to him? Did he give up the chase after Crater Lake?"

"Daggett never gave up the chase. But he never had the intent to murder. He wanted to see Tom, whom he really thought conscienceless—wanted to see him suffer for what he did to his sister. But then he found out that Tom had a very deep conscience. The only reason Daggett didn't tell Tom about his own predictions of Tom's death was that he was still full of hostility over his half-sister's fate. But he had decided to write Tom the truth, when he heard of his death."

The members stared at me.

"How did I know that, gentlemen?" I asked. "It was easy. It was I who had a scholarship in Mexico, where I studied Hispanic American Literature, and call me Henry, or call me Hank, I was Helen's half brother. I was 'Daggett'."

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a *NEW* detective story by

JULIAN SYMONS

first publication in the United States

The American businessman and art collector was no fool when it came to buying a genuine Corot. But there was no harm in making doubly sure. So it was obviously a case for the art connoisseurship of Max van Galen, "the greatest expert on Corot outside France" — and for the criminological connoisseurship of Francis Quarles. . .

HOW TO TRAP A CROOK

by JULIAN SYMONS

A pretty little swindle, Francis Quarles said afterward, one that showed how the most intelligent of detectives can be made to look like a fool. But in telling the story, which involved at one point his own distinct discomfiture, Quarles retained the air of imperturbable self-esteem that infuriated so many of his acquaintances.

The affair began, as Quarles told it, when Charles Henderson was brought by Molly Player into Quarles's office with the big window overlooking Trafalgar Square. Henderson was a big, ruddy, conservatively dressed American.

"Mr. Quarles, you may not know who I am—"

Quarles held up a hand. "I should think it very remiss not to have *Who's Who in America* on my shelves, and after your telephone call not to consult it. You are the president of the Porkette Manufacturing and Canning Company, you have a wife and three children, an apartment in New York, and a house on Long Island. You are known colloquially as Porkette Henderson. The financial sec-

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tion of the *Times* tells me that you are here to find new retail outlets for Porkette. Correct so far?"

"Correct but irrelevant," Henderson said. It is unusual for a detective to be disliked by a client, but as Quarles realized, Henderson obviously disliked him from the start. Was it the rather extravagantly Edwardian cut of the detective's jacket, the large diamond ring he wore, or simply his air of knowing beforehand what you were about to say? Whatever the reason, Quarles sensed the antagonism and responded to it. As Henderson's manner became more brisk and businesslike, Quarles's appeared more esthetically languid.

"I suspect I may be about to be conned, and my friend Willard Monteith—"

"The Chicago attorney."

"Yes. Willard told me you'd helped him in a matter relating to a dispute about a picture."

"An attempt to provide a provenance for a fake Matisse, yes. A flight to Paris, a chat with a couple of colleagues there, and the matter was settled."

"Willard reckoned you knew your way about the art world." Henderson's gaze shifted to the picture above Quarles's desk. "That's a nice Utrillo."

"Yves Poirier of the Galerie Poirier gave it to me after I had recovered his wife's three kidnaped cats."

"I like to think I've got the finest private collection of Nineteenth Century paintings in New York," Henderson said. "And every time I come over I try to add to it. Have you heard of a man named Charles Scrutton?"

"The Scrutton Gallery, just off New Bond Street. I know him slightly, only slightly."

"He's offered me a Corot landscape. It's done in that typical silvery Corot style. And the price is reasonable, very reasonable."

"And you are asking for my advice. Simple, Mr. Henderson. I said I knew Scrutton only slightly, but I know his reputation well enough. Don't buy from him. Or if you must buy, get the provenance of the picture established beyond doubt—speak to its former owner yourself if possible—"

"Mr. Quarles." Beneath his silver crew cut Henderson's face was red with annoyance. "I am not totally stupid about buying pictures, and I know Scrutton's reputation. At the same time

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I'm not convinced that I shouldn't buy from him."

"He has never been convicted, or even charged with anything, that's true."

"More than that, I know a couple of people who have bought pictures from him with which they're perfectly happy. They swear Scrutton's absolutely honest."

Quarles's bulky shoulders shrugged under the Edwardian jacket. "If you are not interested in my advice I don't see how I can help you."

"Willard said you were friendly with Max van Galen. I suppose he's just about the greatest expert on Corot and Manet outside France. If it was possible to get van Galen to take a look at this Corot of Scrutton's, I'd be grateful."

"Why not ask him yourself?"

"I've tried." Henderson's face grew redder. "I never even got to talk to him. His secretary said Professor van Galen was too busy to deal with personal requests. You know he's Professor of Fine Art at London University."

"So you want me to arrange something for you that you can't do yourself? Just to make it clear."

Henderson glared. "I'll pay you for your services."

Quarles held up the hand on which the diamond ring glinted. "That doesn't arise. This will be for amusement only." He spoke to Molly in the outer office. "Molly, see if you can get me Max van Galen. In person. Thank you."

He smiled blandly at Henderson, who got up and looked out of the window at Nelson on his column and the lions below. The telephone rang, and Quarles spoke.

"Max? Francis Quarles. I'm very well, and how are you? No, nothing like that, just what may be an entertaining little problem concerning a Corot. An American acquaintance of mine has been offered one. By Charles Scrutton." A pause, and then Quarles laughed. "I've told him that, but he is not deterred. Is there any chance you might be able to look at it yourself? Of course you're busy, Max, but the walk to New Bond Street will do you good." He put his hand over the receiver. "When are you seeing Scrutton, to decide about the picture?"

"Eleven o'clock tomorrow."

"Could you be there at eleven fifteen tomorrow morning, Max? Marvelous. Yes, I'll

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promise that." He put down the telephone. "Max is a great man for fish. I promised him lunch at Prunier's after we'd looked at the picture. That will be at your expense."

Henderson grunted. "Why did you say eleven fifteen to him instead of eleven?"

"Because it will give Scrutton time to make his sales pitch for the picture and to guarantee its genuineness. Our objects are not identical, Mr. Henderson. You want to make sure that you are not conned. For me, this should be a simple demonstration of how to trap a crook."

"You're convinced Scrutton will try to put something over on me?"

"Of course. From his point of view that's the object of the exercise."

Henderson and Quarles got out of the taxi. The façade said *Charles Scrutton, Fine Art* in elegant lettering. In the window was a single small painting of a mill and trees, labeled *17th Century Dutch School.*

Inside the gallery a sleek assistant advanced and then retreated as Henderson identified himself. Charles Scrutton came forward with hand outstretched. He was a tall florid man with thick muttonchop whiskers, and he wore a suit of powerful checks. His manner was bluffly rural. He looked as little like an art dealer as it was possible to imagine.

"Mr. Henderson." He paused fractionally before giving Quarles a firm handshake. "And Francis Quarles, isn't it? I think we last met at that party for the Whistler exhibition."

"Mr. Quarles is interested," Henderson said. "He has a fine Utrillo on his office wall. He wanted to see this Corot."

"There it is." Scrutton switched on a light, illuminating a picture which showed rocks, trees, and a stream. The two men stood looking at it. Quarles could not have told whether it was by Corot or by one of a dozen other French artists.

"It's Corot's style, all right," Henderson said.

Scrutton pulled at his muttonchop whiskers. "Mr. Henderson, I'm not going to sell you this picture."

"You mean you've got another buyer?" Henderson flushed angrily. "I call that—"

"I won't sell it to you because it is not a genuine Corot. I'm very much afraid it's from Dr. Jousseaume's collec-

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tion. You've heard of Jousseaume? He made a tremendous collection of Corot paintings and drawings. When he died in 1923 they were let loose on the market and three-quarters of them turned out to be fakes, done especially for the doctor's benefit. Like other dealers I watch out for things from the Jousseaume collection and try to avoid them, but every so often you get caught. I've checked this one thoroughly, and I'm afraid there's no doubt about it." He gave them a ruefully comical glance. "It doesn't often happen, but this time Charles Scrutton's been had."

Quarles asked, "As a matter of interest, what will you do with the painting now?"

"Put it in a sale as 'attributed to Corot' or 'in the manner of Corot,' for whatever it will fetch. That won't be much." The telephone rang. The assistant murmured something to Scrutton, who excused himself and left them.

Henderson turned to Quarles. "A simple demonstration of how to trap a crook, eh? How about that, Quarles? Admit you were wrong."

Before the detective could reply the door opened and Max van Galen came into the gallery.

The art expert was a short squat man with a hurried, jerky walk, and the wide mouth and popping eyes of a frog. His voice was a frog's croak.

"Quarles, how are you, nice to see you again." He gave a perfunctory handshake and a popeyed stare at Henderson, and said, "Now, where's this picture you want me to look at?"

Scrutton came back and said, "Professor, this is a pleasure. And an honor. You don't know me, but I recognize you. I'm Charles Scrutton."

Van Galen allowed his hand to be pumped. "The picture."

Henderson spoke in some confusion. "Mr. Scrutton, I may as well admit I asked the Professor to come along here and check on the picture. I'm not feeling too proud of myself at the moment."

"*You* asked?" Van Galen snapped at him. "I don't know you. I spoke to Francis Quarles here."

Quarles said, "The point is that Mr. Scrutton has discovered that the painting is not genuine and has very properly withdrawn it."

"It's one of the Jousseaume lot, I'm afraid. See for your-

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self." Scrutton switched on the light above the painting again. Van Galen took a magnifying glass from his pocket, glanced at the painting, and immediately put the glass back.

"A close inspection is not necessary. This is a very poor piece of work. I am surprised you should have bought it."

"We all make mistakes," Scrutton said cheerfully. His glance moved quickly from one to the other of them. "Professor van Galen, since you're here I should like to ask you a favor. A couple of days ago I acquired another picture, which I do believe to be a genuine Corot. Would you care to give your opinion of it?"

"I am always ready to look at a picture."

"I'm grateful. Jordan, will you get that little Corot landscape." Scrutton said to Henderson, "I couldn't offer you this picture because at the time you got in touch with me I didn't possess it."

Jordan returned with a picture which he stood on a small table. It showed a snowy landscape, with a small house in the background and a man standing beside it. The four of them looked at it.

"Full of charm, don't you think?" Scrutton said. "It's called 'Winter Landscape.' Rather like the Lincolnshire fen country, where I was brought up."

"This is a different matter from that other—affair." Van Galen bent over, examining the picture closely under his magnifying glass. He put away the glass and went on looking, then straightened up with a sigh of pleasure, and said simply, "Yes."

"It's a genuine Corot?" the American asked.

"It is a very good Corot, a lovely picture. It is a pleasure to see it."

"Mr. Scrutton, would you like to put a price on that picture?"

"If you'll just come into my office, we can talk about it."

Henderson paused at the office door and said with heavy irony, "You don't have any doubts, Quarles?"

"As far as I'm concerned, Max van Galen's word is law."

"And of course you're not an art expert yourself."

"I'm not an art expert," Quarles agreed.

Van Galen rubbed his hands. "I am looking forward to lunch. Are plovers' eggs in season?"

Quarles was standing beside

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the picture, with his back to van Galen. "I doubt it. You may have to settle for caviar as an opening course." He turned. "There's no doubt about the authenticity of this Corot?"

Van Galen laughed. "You know the definition of being positive? To be mistaken at the top of your voice. An expert learns to be careful. But I should be prepared to offer a sporting bet of twenty to one that this is a genuine Corot. You didn't expect this to happen?"

Before Quarles could reply, Henderson and Scrutton returned. "Can I take it with me?" the American asked. "I want to do a little gloating in my suite at the Savoy."

"I'd sooner send it along—there are customs forms to complete, and so on."

"I should like to take it now, Mr. Scrutton. You have my check."

Scrutton hesitated, then said, "Yes, of course. Jordan, will you pack up this picture for Mr. Henderson." The sleek assistant came forward and took the Corot. "It's a pleasure to sell something to a man who's going to enjoy it."

"I'm very very happy." A smile spread over Henderson's face. "Are you happy, Quarles?"

"I'm glad you've got what you wanted." Quarles strolled about the gallery, looking at the other pictures. He turned as Jordan came back with the picture wrapped in heavy paper. "I thought it was charming, as Scrutton said."

"Pleased you approve of my choice."

"So charming that I should like to see it again." Scrutton stared at him. "Would you unwrap it, please?"

"What the hell d'you mean, what are you talking about? Jordan, stop him."

Quarles was already at the wrapping paper, tearing it away. There was an undignified scuffle, and then the picture was revealed. It showed a snowy landscape, with a small house in the background and a man standing beside it.

"Are you off your head, Quarles?" Henderson asked. "That's my picture."

"It is not your picture." Quarles moved quickly across to the room where Jordan had taken the Corot, went in, and came out with another picture in his hands showing the same scene. "*This* is your Corot. If you'll just lift that telephone and ring for the police, Max, I'll

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make sure that Mr. Scrutton stays here."

"It was a neat variation on an old trick," Quarles said. "He gained your confidence by denouncing an obvious fake, then showed the genuine Corot, and then substituted the copy. Max being there was a stroke of luck for him, because his authentication left you without the shadow of a doubt. You wouldn't have bothered about any further examination, would you?"

A chastened Henderson shook his head. Van Galen said through a mouthful of caviar, "It was a very good copy. Carefully done. I should have needed a close examination to be sure about it."

"That's what I don't understand," Henderson said hesitantly. "You knew it was a copy immediately, Quarles. That seems like magic to me. How did you do it?"

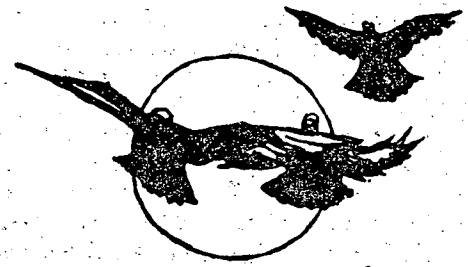
"A genuine, a perfect lobster bisque." Quarles looked at his empty plate with regret. "I knew there must be some trick involved, you see."

"So?"

"So I marked the frame of the genuine Corot on the back with a cross, while you were making your deal with Scrutton. There was no cross on the frame of the other one."

Henderson looked disappointed. "I see. Really very simple."

"But of course. Didn't I tell you it would be a simple demonstration of how to trap a crook?"



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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Ellery Queen:

Here is my newest mystery parody, this one of the tough paperback heroes and anti-heroes, particularly the kind that show up in books by John D. MacDonald, Donald Hamilton, and Donald E. Westlake (when he's being Richard Stark).

Sincerely,

Ron Goulart

THE GOLD MEDAL CAPER

by RON GOULART

It had probably been a mistake killing the engineer because now there was nobody to make the train go. Shooting the porter was okay because Decker was a big man and capable of carrying his own suitcases, even when they were full of gold bricks as they were now.

Honk Decker was a big rough man. He looked like a stack of tombstones and had a face like alligator shoes and hands like plates of spareribs and eyes like silver marbles in small-town pinball machines. In motion, as he was now, he resembled a truckload of fiberglass careening over a cliff. Women kept wanting to make love to him.

The local police were looking for Decker and already the Georgia State Police had broadcast his description. It had come over the news while he was in the coffee shop across from the train station. "Be on the lookout for a man who looks like a pile of tombstones and has a face like alligator shoes and eyes like silver marbles, wearing a brown suit and matching accessories."

Decker knew at once the waitress had spotted him. The way she screamed and dropped his pie à la mode. Decker had shot her. Not thinking about it, just doing it because it was the easiest way. Then the short-order cook had looked out to see what all the noise was and Decker had shot him, too. The other four customers in the

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place had grown suspicious by this time, which was why he shot them. What with one thing and another he'd had to shoot everybody in the town.

Sometimes a job goes that way. You make the score, but still things go a little wrong. Decker was an anti-hero and not sentimental. He wished now, though, he hadn't shot the train engineer. And the blind man who sold magazines in the train station, because he liked to buy a magazine and read it on the train.

Decker sat in his compartment for a while, then he decided he'd have to run the train himself. He had an appointment with an FBI man named Elroy Howard and he had to be in Amarillo, Texas, soon. Decker had shot Howard's partner in the course of the Green Banana Caper, but apparently there were no hard feelings. That was the professional way to be. Decker worked both sides of the law. He never had any trouble when he went up against a pro like himself.

He strode up to the engine, tossed out the body of the engineer, and started the train. Decker knew all about how things worked and, except for a head-on collision with a freight train just outside Wichita Falls, he had no trouble keeping his appointment.

The FBI man screwed a little black button into his left ear. "Okay, Decker, I'll outline the caper to you."

The ice in Decker's highball sounded like the winter thaw breaking up as the big man waved his hand at the small secret agent. "What's that dingus in your ear, Howie?"

"It's a listening device, Decker," replied Howard, looking down. "It's sort of a habit I have. I'm so used to listening to people over bugging devices I can't hear any other way any more. Excuse it, huh?"

It was odd, but not dangerous. "Tell me about the score I have to make."

"The what?"

Decker raised his voice and it sounded like a log jam splitting up on a roaring mountain river. "I mean what kind of job does the government have for me."

"Wait a sec." The FBI man got down on his hands and knees and crawled under the bed. The springs jiggled and the bed humped to starboard once. Then Howard's head, bug still in ear, emerged. "You don't mind if I stretch out under here? This is how I usually listen to crooks. I feel more at home."

"You still have me in your book as a hood."

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"Gee, Decker, you know how Washington is. You were, after all, head of the Outfit for six months last year."

"That was only until I got a better job."

"I know that and you know that, but to the FBI brass it's a black mark," said Howard. "And they don't really like how you're always killing people. Like during the Pink Lemonade Caper you shot that whole symphony orchestra in Detroit."

"I was trying to get my girl back."

"You know that and I know that, Decker, but the FBI doesn't understand love."

Decker shrugged and his shoulders looked like two Japanese wrestlers jumping up and down. "Now you guys want to hire me for a score, huh?"

"We got something that's more up your alley than ours." The agent wriggled once and pulled a puff of dust out from under him. "You ought to keep this place cleaner."

"This isn't my house. I broke in here today so I'd have a quiet place to talk."

"Same old Decker," chuckled the FBI man. "Okay, now this is the lay of the caper. You've heard of the Lodestonian Institute Museum in Washington, D.C.?"

"Full of junk."

"That's the place. A repository of historical relics. This situation is too complex to document you on completely. Let me simply tell you that the Russian Embassy now owns the Lodestonian Institute Museum and they have six Russian spies living there."

"So?"

"We think the Russians are sending secret information out of the museum, by way of tourists and visitors."

"Send a fake tourist in."

"It isn't so simple. The only tourists they'll let in have to be Russian spies, too."

"Send a fake Russian spy in."

"We tried that," admitted Howard. "But our man couldn't speak Russian and they tumbled to him."

"You guys didn't plan carefully enough."

"Well, we gave him a Russian name and one of those funny hats they wear. I guess we don't have your knack for laying out a caper, Decker."

"Where do I come into this mess?"

"We have information that the next secret message will be ready to go two days from now. It's been engraved on a gold medal and the medal is pinned on the chest of a dummy replica of Benjamin Franklin."

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"Where's the Franklin dummy located?"

"Sitting in the cockpit of the Spirit of St. Louis."

"How come?"

"The Russians have no sense of history."

"You have maps of the area, blueprints of the building and the adjacent buildings?"

Howard grunted and handed him a large roll of rubber-band-tied papers. "I thought you might ask."

Decker asked, "What are you paying?"

"How about a $2000 deduction from your next income tax?"

"Bull," Decker told him. "I need money in front, Howie. $5000 for me and $2000 to split among the bunch I hire for the score."

"Oh, okay." The FBI man wiggled and handed out a wad of 100-dollar bills. "Catch."

"Thanks. I'll be in touch. I'm flying to Ampex, Florida, on the next flight out."

"Why Florida?"

"I don't know," said Decker. "But you can't seem to do one of these things without spending at least a little time in Florida."

He strode to the door and when it stuck he kicked it out of the way.

Shinglewitz came in from the kitchen of the Florida apartment. "There's no more ice."

Decker didn't reply. There wasn't any ice. No need to comment.

Shinglewitz sat down and held up a glass of green fluid. "See what happened to my popsicle? It gets hot and things melt."

That was true. Decker didn't argue. He shuffled his bulk and it was like several old brownstone buildings falling over. "I thought you hired me a jugger."

"I thought the Outfit was providing him."

Decker frowned. "This score we're working for the government, remember?"

"I can never keep track." Shinglewitz sipped his popsicle. "Sometimes you're a secret agent, sometimes you're a beach bum Robin Hood, sometimes a private eye, sometimes a hired killer and heist artist. I go in and out of stir a lot. I lose track."

"I'm a secret agent this time," Decker told him again. He didn't like to repeat himself.

"Boy, the freelance life. It's uncertain."

The kitchen door opened and Lizorty came in with Gronquist. "Two dead guys in the kitchen," said Lizorty, scratching his curly head.

That was true. There were.

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Decker said, "Sit down."

"I meant to mention them, too," said Shinglewitz. "I thought you just said you were a government agent this caper and not a hired killer?"

"Just because Uncle Sam pays me doesn't mean I can't kill a few people," Decker explained. "Where's that safecracker I need?"

Lizorty said, "That's him in the kitchen, on the left. You shot him."

That was a slip. Decker acknowledged it with a brief grin. "Too many guys coming around here acting tough. Get me another safecracker, but a guy who doesn't act so hardnose."

"How about McSpadden?" asked Gronquist. "He's out of stir."

"What was he in for?"

"They caught him dressing up like a lady and rolling sailors."

Decker asked, "What kind of lady did he dress up like?"

"A sweet little old lady with a shawl," said Lizorty.

Decker shook his big head. "No, that's too strange. A guy dresses up like a pretty girl once in a while and that's not so bad. Dressing up like somebody's mother is just strange. There's no place for strange guys on this job."

Lizorty asked, "What sort of score do you have in mind?"

Decker unrolled the maps and blueprints the FBI agent had loaned him. He blew off the carpet dust and said, "Most of you guys haven't hit a national museum before, so pay attention."

As they sped along the road Decker cracked his knuckles. It sounded like a giant eating crackers.

Lizorty yelped and drove their big fast late-model car off the superhighway and into a marshy field. "What was that noise?"

It was obvious and Decker didn't bother to explain. He shot Lizorty, dumped him, and drove back onto the highway.

From the back seat Gronquist said, "He'd been kind of jumpy lately, Decker."

Anyone could see that. "There's no place for jumpy guys on this job. Now we'll go over the plan for this job again," he said in his patient rumbling voice. His voice reminded you of boulders rolling down gentle grassy slopes.

Shinglewitz mumbled something.

"What's that?" asked Decker.

"He says he cracked his upper plate when we careened," explained Gronquist.

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One hand on the wheel, Decker pointed his gun back at the mumbling Shinglewitz. "There's no place on this job for guys who can't talk straight." His finger tightened on the trigger.

Shinglewitz waved something white.

Decker squinted into the rearview mirror. "What does that mean? You surrender?"

"He's waving his spare upper plate," said Gronquist hurriedly. "He can talk good again when he gets it in."

"We'll have to see."

"Look, look, I'm talking fine," cried Shinglewitz.

"You got a trace of a lisp."

"I had that before."

"Well, okay." Decker holstered his gun in his cavernous armpit. The car continued along the ribbon of highway. "Do you have your part in the caper straight, Gronquist?"

"At 11:06 A.M. I enter the woolen mill next to the museum. I get over to the sectional warper and smash the dobby loom and then thrust my shoe into the warp bobbins. That will cause the weft bobbins to malfunction and fall into the beam warping area. All of which will create a lot of confusion."

Decker asked flatly, "How do you get inside the woolen mill in the first place?"

"I sneak up behind the guard and hit him on the head with a flatiron."

"You know how a flatiron works, Gronquist?"

"Sure, Decker. We went over it when we planned this score."

Decker snapped out, "Repeat it."

"Well, the modern electric iron comprises a sole plate, an intermediate plate, a cover with handle, an electric heating element, a selector disc, and a glow lamp, Decker. By means of the selector device the temperature can be set to values suitable for different fabrics, such as nylon, rayon, wool, cotton, linen. This adjustment is achieved by means of a thermostat. The three-wire—"

"Enough," cut in Decker The man obviously knew what he was talking about. "When you're on a job with me you have to know how every weapon works."

"You sure know a lot," said Shinglewitz with his new teeth.

Decker didn't argue.

Striding into the repair shop with the snowplow under his arm, Decker resembled a Roman gladiator with a spear. He glanced at the wall clock. It was 11:02 in the nation's capital. The job was going smooth so far. "Can you fix this?"

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The woman behind the counter of the little shop next to the Lodestonian Institute Museum shook her head. "Nope."

Decker tensed. The plan was starting to sour. "What do you mean, lady? This is a snowplow." He knifed a big thumb at the sign in her window. "Acme Snowplow Repair Shop. That's you, isn't it?"

"No. I'm Helen's Mending. I only opened this morning and you're my very first customer. You want a free gardenia? I can fix your suit. You seem to have a big lump under your left arm."

Damn. Lizorty was supposed to have checked this out. A thought came to Decker as fast as lightning can strike a tree during a bad storm in a rural community. "Yeah, you can mend my coat. It's frayed at the elbow. Can I go in the back room and change?"

"Just to take off your coat? You're not that modest."

"I have spots on my shirt." He leaped over the counter before the frail woman could say anything else.

"Be careful where you set that dirty old snowplow, you hear?"

Decker elbowed into the pink fitting room. He whapped the snowplow with his big fist and the special compartment he'd made there snapped open and six fat sticks of dynamite fell into his vast palm. Decker swung at the wall with the snowplow, making a quick hole big enough to hold the dynamite. He carefully and expertly jammed in the sticks, lit the fuses, threw himself out in the shop again.

"That was quick," said the frail woman. "Oh, but you still have your jacket on. Don't be so shy."

The wall blew. Decker leaped in as debris settled. Elbowed through the fresh hole. As he had calculated, he was in the museum now, behind a display of famous first ladies. He booted Dolly Madison aside and ran, cautiously, for the hanging airship which contained the Ben Franklin dummy and the gold medal he was after.

"Hey, buddy," called a uniformed guard. "No running in the museum."

Decker kept running. He was like a magnificent racehorse who can smell the finish line scant yards away.

"Okay for you," called the guard. "I was going to overlook your kicking Dolly Madison in the keaster, but now you're going to get it."

Decker checked his wrist watch. 11:07. Exactly on time the wall of the adjoining woolen mill fell over. The

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pursuing guard was, as Decker had planned, buried in rubble.

Decker spotted the plane, gave a running jump, and got a firm grip on the wing. The ship ripped from its moorings and crashed to the highly polished floor.

Out of the cockpit tumbled Agent Howard of the FBI.

"What now?" asked Decker, wiping fusilage off himself.

"I tried to get hold of you, Decker, but nobody answered at your place in Texas."

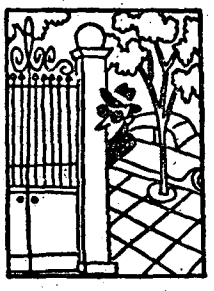
"I was in Florida, remember?"

Howard slapped his forehead. "Boy, what a sap. I forgot. Well, no harm done. It seems the Russians got wind of our little caper, through one of my boys I'm sorry to say. They moved out late last night. Same time as the snowplow people did."

Decker gritted his big teeth, then got hold of himself. "It's okay, Howie. We got paid and had a few laughs. Every job can't go smooth."

"Sure, right. I'm glad you feel that way, Decker."

Decker didn't want to talk any more, though. He stalked out of the museum, walked across Washington, D.C. He caught the first plane to Florida. Down there he sat on the beach for several days. He felt so low he didn't shoot anybody for nearly a week.



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a *NEW* short story by

ANTHONY GILBERT

Once again we cannot resist saying it: Anthony Gilbert writes a kind of crime story all her own; no one else in or out of the mystery field writes quite the same way about quite the same people. . .Here is the story of what happened fifty years ago in the home of Admiral Webb, at Number 4 Frederick Street in St. Charles-on-Sea, as seen through the eyes of Lily, one of the servants in the house — the story of Admiral Webb's ward, Vicky, the vital vivacious Vicky, the alluring and radiant Vicky, a girl "made for joy". . .

FIFTY YEARS AFTER

by ANTHONY GILBERT

When I saw the house where the terrible thing happened, 50 years after the event, it scarcely seemed to have changed at all: a high narrow house sadly in need of a new coat of paint. In those days Admiral Webb had bought it for his wife and the three daughters whom Mrs. Webb hadn't contrived to marry off. Small chance they'll have here, the neighbors had said, for St. Charles-on-Sea had been born middle-aged.

The daughters were Miss Maude, the showy one in the splendid hats and flying scarves and Bohemian airs; she was once stopped on the High Street by an artist who wanted to paint her. In lieu of a husband she had her lawn tennis and croquet and was a member of the Bridge Club.

Miss Sarah was the religious one, and pretty Miss Meg was a real storybook daughter-at-home. Miss Meg paid calls with her mother in the hired carriage, arranged flowers, pottered about the garden. She was a wonderful dressmaker, made all her own clothes, but she never made so much as a smicket for Vicky.

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Vicky was Victoria Gaye who burst into the household with all the suddenness of a bomb. One morning the Admiral received a letter with a London postmark, and for once he failed to go to his window chair in the club and play the chess tournament he was expected to win—chess was his passion, as gardening was Mrs. Webb's and religion Miss Sarah's.

About five o'clock he returned home, bringing with him a little girl of 13 or so, small and dark, wearing a sailor suit much too young for her. Her luggage was one of those straw baskets that girls have when they first go out to service, before they graduate to a tin trunk.

"This is Victoria Gaye," he said. "Her mother and I were cousins, but when we were young we were more like brother and sister."

It seemed Mrs. Gaye had made a late improvident marriage, her husband had left her, and she had been eking out a wretched living copying music and teaching piano lessons to small children. She had succumbed suddenly to some kind of heart condition, abandoning Vicky to the world.

"But fortunately the landlady found my address in Caroline's book and wrote to me," the Admiral wound up.

"I do not recall your mentioning her," said Mrs. Webb. She was short and solid, rather like the old Queen, with an alexandrine fringe, and she ruled her household with a rod of iron.

"Oh, Caroline was younger than I and inevitably our paths diverged. But she remembered she had a cousin. And now," he added to Vicky, who hadn't yet opened her mouth, "you will have cousins, too."

I seldom saw Mrs. Webb flabbergasted, but she was flabbergasted then.

"You have invited her here for a visit?" Not a welcoming word, mark you.

"This is to be her home," explained the Admiral in his bluff naval way. "It will be good to have something young about the house again."

"Our daughters," began Mrs. Webb, but he laughed and said, "They'll be pleased as Punch to have a younger sister to cosset." He really believed it. He smiled at Vicky and said, "This is Lily. She will show you the room that is to be yours. I daresay it'll not take long to get it shipshape."

It was an awkward situation from the start. Vicky—she asked me to call her that from the outset—was too young for

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anyone in that household except the Admiral. Miss Maude looked through her, Miss Sarah spent more time than ever wearing out the knees of her skirts praying in cold churches for the newcomer's soul, and to Miss Meg she was a mystery she couldn't hope to solve. They all shelved her conveniently.

But for the Admiral she'd have had a pretty poor time, with Mrs. Webb treating her like Little Orphan Annie and looking surprised each morning to find she was still on the premises. But the Admiral took to her from the beginning, and not just because he'd known her mother. He used to take her walking in the Garth—the big gardens opposite the house—when he came back from mornings at his club, and often on to tea at Anderson's, the famous pastry cooks whose wedding cakes were popular all over the county. If it was wet and he had no afternoon engagement, he taught her to play chess; he'd never been successful with his own girls, but he said she was as sharp as a man—a great compliment in those days.

When the question of her education cropped up, Mrs. Webb was all for sending her away to boarding school; there were no local schools because there were no local children, except during holiday periods when grandchildren came to visit. But once again the Admiral had his way.

"This is virtually the first settled home Victoria has had. Her days of being badgered from pillar to post are over."

Eventually a governess was decided on, and Letitia Bagguley joined the household. I was fascinated by her name before ever I saw her. She was nearly as dark as Vicky, with curly black hair and eyes as bright as a bird's. She was part Irish, I think, and she wasn't Mrs. Webb's choice—she had preferred a sober middle-aged woman named Sharman—but the Admiral said, "We are all old fogeys here—let her have someone young."

Miss Bagguley was 22, which was practically childhood in St. Charles. When I saw the two of them together, I thought, Dynamite!—and was amazed that no one but myself seemed to notice. But to Mrs. Webb a governess was a governess, as impersonal as the housemaid or the postman.

I don't know how good a governess Miss Bagguley was, but she was very good for Vicky in other ways.

"You don't want to stay in Sleepy Hollow all your life," she'd say. "Life's for living."

She brought a bicycle with

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her and I had mine, and we used to run with Vicky, one of us on each side, in the lane behind the houses until Vicky could balance by herself. As soon as the Admiral saw she could ride he bought her a bicycle of her own and she and Miss Bagguley would go soaring over the Downs which were wild and free in those days half a century ago.

"Is that child learning anything?" Mrs. Webb would demand.

And the Admiral would say, "She is learning to be happy."

Sometimes, when I had my afternoon off and Alfred couldn't meet me, I would go up to the Downs, too, and we would all have a cottage tea together. Mrs. Webb didn't know about it, of course; she never thought of Vicky as the equal of her own daughters, but she wouldn't have allowed her to have tea with a servant. (Alfred was my young man; we'd been keeping company for two years and as soon as he got a raise we would get married; but he didn't mean us to start in two rooms in his mother's house. What's worth having is worth waiting for, he said.)

Other times, when Miss Bagguley had her free afternoons—and she made friends the way a bear scents out honey—Vicky would come slipping down to the kitchen. Mrs. Skimpole, the cook, and Edwardes, the parlormaid, used to sit in the servants' sitting room in the front, but I never felt comfortable there; they were both so old. Vicky would sit with me and help me with darning and mending and we bought paper patterns and made her blouses—she'd have had little enough if she'd depended on Mrs. Webb.

"You must remember you will have to earn your own living," Mrs. Webb told Vicky. "Perhaps you could teach young children."

But Vicky laughed and said the only children she'd want to teach would be her own, though how she expected to meet a young man in Frederick Street I couldn't imagine. She'd never even catch sight of one over the banisters. Mind you, Miss Bagguley did her best—she took chances that Miss Sharman would never even have considered. Once, when I was out with Alfred, I saw the two of them at a beach café having tea with two men, neither of them quite as young as they'd like to be, but all laughing and chattering and Vicky smiling to beat the band. I recognized the men—part of the pierrot troup that came to St. Charles every summer and performed on the beach. The daughters wouldn't

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have paid threepence for a chair, but Miss Bagguley did, and—well, it was never hard for her to make friends.

Another time she'd take Vicky on the pier—ninepence including the price of a ticket for the current entertainment (the Admiral was generous with pocket money and Vicky was a natural spendthrift). They'd put coppers in the slot machines, playing football or horseracing. Vicky loved it.

I think, in the light of what happened later, Miss B. must have been glad she'd given the girl so much happiness. For you'd have said Vicky was made for joy. When that first surface lack of assurance had worn off and she knew the Admiral was on her side, she sparkled with vitality. Miss Sarah tried to cash in by asking her to keep some of her high spirits for God's service. No one else, except the Admiral, seemed to notice.

Vicky was 16 when something happened that broke the whole pattern of affairs. Miss Bagguley's mother was suddenly taken ill and Letitia had to go up and look after her business; she had a boarding-house in Cheshire and boarding-houses don't run themselves.

"She must go as soon as we can make arrangements," said Mrs. Webb.

"She must go today," said the Admiral and he ordered a fly and saw her off from the station.

"You must continue to study by yourself," Mrs. Webb told Vicky.

"There is no sense in lessons," Vicky told her. "How does knowing the principal products of the countries of Europe or the names of the chief rivers help one to live?"

"Even if you only teach small children," said Miss Maude carelessly, "you will need to know something. Parents expect value for their money." She was getting a bit long in the tooth now, past 30 and still on the hunt.

"Perhaps she could be a children's nurse," suggested Miss Meg, who was a nice girl, but not very well furnished upstairs.

But the Admiral said he regarded her as one of his own and wasn't going to have her cleaning nurseries and black-leading grates. He never understood—none of them did—that provided she was happy Vicky didn't care what she had to do. With Miss Bagguley out of the way for weeks—for Mrs. Bagguley didn't improve as they'd hoped—Vicky was like a dog without a tail. I blame the family for what followed. None of them put herself out to make

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her feel at home, and she was left to find her own entertainment.

Vicky spent long afternoons up on the Downs with her bicycle, bringing back flowers which she put into a bit of rough ground at the foot of Mrs. Webb's garden, so it was as though the woodland had crept in from the back lane. She worked in the garden, too; no one let her touch the plants, but she gathered the fallen leaves between two wooden boards and dumped them on the compost heap, and dealt with the weeds in a fashion Miss Meg never would. Miss Meg was fussy about her appearance—well, it was all she had. Weed-killer might hurt her hands that she needed for piano practise. Vicky worked in the garden like a little gnome.

Then the Admiral became ill, going out one cold day insufficiently wrapped up, and the ensuing chill settled in his lungs. He was such a hale well-built fellow you could never think of him as being an elderly man, marching down to the Club every morning and back up the hill to lunch, round to the Chess Centre or the library, and taking Vicky to the Garth and on to tea. It was somehow shocking he should be ill.

In those days hospitals were for the poor; sick folk were nursed in their own home in the Admiral's stratum of society. Sir George Gosheron, the biggest doctor in the county, was called in, and his carriage and pair stood outside the door every day for a fortnight. Mrs. Webb wouldn't have Vicky in the sickroom, and Mrs. Skimpole wouldn't have her in the kitchen. She was left very much to her own devices. One day I crossed the Garth and she was sitting on a seat talking to a young man who'd never called at No. 4 and laughing in a way that would put the sun into a November sky.

Then the Admiral took a turn for the worse and Sir George sent a nurse in, which always makes extra work for the staff, since she couldn't eat with the family and wouldn't eat in the kitchen and had to have separate trays.

Then Miss Bagguley wrote, asking for her bits and pieces, and Mrs. Webb sent them back. "Isn't Letty coming back?" Vicky cried, and Mrs. Webb said, "You are almost seventeen. You don't require a governess any longer."

They never seemed to ask what she did with herself during the days. They should blame themselves for that.

The blow when it fell shocked everyone. The Admiral

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was still convalescent, the nurse had gone. He used to ask for Vicky to read to him—he was still sleeping in the spare room—or play chess on the big black-and-white board. Mrs. Webb started paying calls again, and Miss Sarah had a novena in gratitude for her father's recovery. Miss Maude took up golf.

One morning Vicky couldn't keep her breakfast down. "Something you have eaten has disagreed with you," said Mrs. Webb. "All those sweets—"

Two days later she fainted in the Admiral's room and he insisted on sending for Dr. Bunn. He was the more homey little doctor whom Mrs. Webb had for the servants.

"It is only growing pains," Mrs. Webb said. "A tonic perhaps—"

But I could have told them better. No one, not even Vicky, anticipated Dr. Bunn's diagnosis.

"The girl is six weeks' pregnant," he said, and to Vicky, "Didn't you even suspect?"

In those days mothers were very guarded about what they told their daughters. I doubt if anyone had tried to tell Vicky the facts of life, and I, who could have done so, wouldn't have dared; I should have got my notice right off. I daresay Miss Bagguley would have said something if it hadn't been for her mother's sudden illness, but everyone was very prudish 50 years ago. I'd seen my mother have four children after me, so I didn't have to be told.

Mrs. Webb, I heard, said only two things and they were both questions.

"Victoria, is this possible?" and "Will he marry you?"

"How can he?" asked Vicky. "He was only here for a holiday." She had no notion where he might be now. I wondered if he might be the young man I had seen her talking with in the Garth.

Young and ignorant and passionate, it must have been easy to sweep her off her feet. According to her, he was very little older than herself.

"He was the first truly young person I had ever known," she said.

"Getting into trouble like a housemaid," said Miss Maude, who didn't believe that housemaids had any feelings, just as anglers tell you fish don't feel anything with the hook in their throat.

"Didn't you think of waiting for marriage?" I asked her, but she said, "I didn't think at all. Oh, Lily, I was in love. Tomorrow didn't exist, everything was today."

Mrs. Webb, of course,

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wanted her out of the house hey presto. "We must consider our own daughters," she told the Admiral.

"Our daughters are young women," said the Admiral. "If they had paid Vicky a little more attention this need never have occurred."

"You would blame your own daughters sooner than that—that waif," shrilled Mrs. Webb.

"She is no waif. She is our responsibility. We are all to blame, Kate."

"But what will people say?" she demanded. I had gone to the Admiral's room with a glass of hot lemon tea; neither of them paid the least attention to me.

"I should not concern myself with gossip," the Admiral said simply. "Now we must think how we can best help her."

"She cannot stay here," Mrs. Webb insisted.

"This is her home."

"She has qualified for a different sort of home. I believe there is a society in London—"

"You would make a present of Vicky's trouble to a *society?*"

"We must think of the future. She cannot stay here and some plan must be evolved for her and the child. And what will others say?"

Mind you, I knew it wasn't so unusual as Mrs. Webb made out. There were plenty of cases where ladies suddenly found that their young daughters had developed a bit of "lung trouble"—the doctor recommends Switzerland, just for a few months, the air, you see. My mother, who had been in service before her marriage, had told me. "And if funds wouldn't run to Switzerland, then there would be an old nurse in the background. It was astounding how many of these old nurses were scattered about in remote country districts." "What happened to the babies?" I asked. "Oh," said my mother, "no one ever spoke of them. They were farmed out or fostered." Abortion wasn't the fashionable thing in those days, except among the poor, and they mostly worked it themselves with domestic means.

It seemed for the first two or three weeks that Vicky actually believed she could have her baby and bring it back to Frederick Street. "I would look after it myself," she said. "Mrs Webb insists that I shall give him up." She always spoke of the child as a son. "But he will be the first thing all my own that I have ever had. I have worn other people's clothes, lived in other people's houses—"

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"A child without a father," I said, but she interrupted fiercely, "I had a father and what use was he to me? He was always going away and my mother was ashamed. Well, if I can't have him here—I remember once my mother had a situation as sewing-maid in a children's home because she was allowed to have me with her. If the Admiral would help me till I am able to work—you said yourself, Lily, I'm as good at darning and patching as you, and I can make children's clothes—I wouldn't mind what I did."

"Does Miss Victoria talk to you, Lily?" Mrs. Webb asked me. "I hope you don't encourage her in her foolish fancies."

And to Vicky she said, "When you are through this piece of trouble you can find some employment, but not if you have an encumbrance."

In the kitchen there wasn't much sympathy shown for the girl. "Made her bed, let her lie on it," said Mrs. Skimpole.

"Maybe she won't come to term," said Edwardes comfortably. "Best for everyone if she don't."

"Might as well take a dose of salts and be done with it," said the under-housemaid pertly.

Salts of lemon was a common way out of trouble for girls who'd fallen into it. Easy to come by—you said you wanted it to clean a straw hat—a penn'orth or two-penn'orth over the counter and no questions asked.

"These silly girls," said Mrs. Skimpole. "If they knew what they were letting themselves in for—" But she boxed the under-housemaid's ears just the same. "We don't want any of that talk," she said.

"Well, I'm sure you keep it conspicuous enough in the housemaid's cupboard," sniveled the girl.

Of course, the talk had already started. Whispers, nudges, glances when the Admiral took Vicky through the Garth. Mrs. Webb saw them all. Mind you, she knew the Admiral had never had any but paternal feelings for the girl, but others were less nice in their thoughts, and Vicky was like a plump dark little partridge, with an allure I don't think she knew she possessed. Of course, the Admiral was well on in his sixties and she was barely 17, but it's happened before.

I caught sight of Mrs. Webb's face when the Admiral said they were responsible and at least partly to blame. It made me think of a line of poetry in a book Vicky had: "Each eye shrank up to a serpent's eye. . ." Mrs. Webb realized

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what people were saying. She'd never forgive Vicky for causing that.

Mrs. Webb was going to London—to see a friend, she said; but everybody seemed to know she would be talking to someone about Vicky's condition. A foolish girl in my household has disgraced herself, that was what she would say, never a word about the girl being her husband's ward. She talked to Vicky in the little schoolroom before she went, and on the way out she left orders that Miss Victoria not be permitted to bother the Admiral, and she wasn't to go out of the house.

After Mrs. Webb departed, the postman brought the day's second mail delivery. There was a letter for Vicky in bold black handwriting and with a Cheshire postmark, so I knew Vicky had disobeyed Mrs.Webb and told Miss Bagguley the truth. I ran up to the schoolroom, the letter in my hand. Vicky was doing nothing, just staring into space; this morning all hope had gone out of her face.

"I thought you would never come, Lily," she said. "She has got everything panned out, is going to make arrangements for a place for me to go while I am waiting for the baby. I could stay here, Lily, I feel well and strong, and there's plenty I could do; but she won't ever let me come back or mention the baby. A lady she knows will find me suitable accommodations when it is born, and then I must look for a situation and put the past out of my mind. As if one could, Lily. The past is part of the present."

When I showed her the letter she brightened. "Perhaps Letty can suggest something. I had to tell her, Lily. I must have someone on my side."

I heard Miss Maude calling me, so I couldn't wait and I didn't see Vicky again till I took up her lunch; now she was transformed, her eyes bright, her face full of hope again.

"I knew she would help me, Lily! She writes that as soon as I am strong again, I can go to her and bring the child. I could be of use there, Lily, sewing and cooking."

I wondered how much Miss B. had told her mother; it doesn't do a boardinghouse any good when it's known there's a "love child" on the premises. And if it cried in the night and disturbed the boarders—but I couldn't say a word to blot out that radiance. Only, "Babies take up a lot of time, Vicky," I warned her and she laughed, and said, "What does it matter, Lily? I shall have all the time there is."

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After lunch she came down saying she couldn't stay in that little box of a room all afternoon; she knew about the embargo on her going out, but Mrs. Webb couldn't object to her doing some work in the garden. The weeds needed attention, I admitted that. Miss Meg got very lazy without her mother to drive her.

Mrs. Webb came back earlier than anyone anticipated and asked at once for Vicky. I had to say she was out in the garden. "Doing the weeding," I added.

"You are sure she has not gone out through the little gate in the wall?"

I had forgotten about the little gate. We used to go through it when Miss Bagguley and I were teaching Vicky to ride. But I said, no, she thought the garden could do with some attention. She would be putting down weed-killer and hunting up the slugs, jobs Miss Meg wouldn't do.

"I'll tell her you are back, madam," I said, but she told me she would go and talk to Vicky among the weeds. Perhaps she thought it would be more private there, and she had things to say not fit for the Admiral's ears. She didn't even go in to see how he was, she was in that much of a hurry to get things settled.

They were down there a long time; then Vicky came helter-skelter up the path as if a bear was after her, her hair flying.

"Do you know what she did, Lily? She trampled all my little garden, she grubbed up the flowers, she said they were weeds and had no part in a civilized place. And she thinks of me as a weed, too, and she would grub me up if she could. But she won't win—I still have one shot left in my locker."

When I took up her supper she wouldn't look at the tray; she just sat there, her chin on her palm, Miss Bagguley's letter clenched in her hand.

When I took the Admiral and Mrs. Webb their milky drinks that night, I put another glass on the tray and two of Mrs. Skimpole's freshly baked fruit scones, thickly plastered with butter. Mrs. Webb noticed them, of course.

"Who are those for, Lily?"

I explained about Vicky eating no supper.

"Tell her to come down here and fetch them for herself. Perhaps by this time she will be able to see reason."

But Vicky wouldn't budge. "I would rather die of starvation," she said. So in the end I took the tray up and left it with her, saying, "You should try to sleep. Things always look better in the morning."

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But not for Vicky. I slipped up with a cup of tea I had sneaked from Mrs. Webb's pot—the schoolroom wasn't supposed to have morning tea; but the minute I saw that dreadful contorted face I knew Vicky wouldn't ever be wanting tea again. I stood by the bed; my hands opened and the cup fell through, and I felt the hot tea spurt on my stocking. Then I was tearing wildly down the stairs to the Admiral's room. I never thought to go to her.

I never saw an old gentleman move so fast as he did when he saw my face.

"Is it Miss Victoria?"

"Oh, sir," I gasped. "I'm afraid she's done herself a mischief."

He was out of bed in a flash, tying the cord of his dressing gown. He made me come with him up the stairs, but on the landing he told me to wait. He went in alone and seemed to be a long time. When he came out he had put on 20 years; for the first time I saw him as an old man. He locked the door and put the key in his pocket. I saw him put his hand over his eyes.

"How could she?" he whispered. "How could she?"

I remembered the talk about the salts of lemon, and I, too, thought, How could she? But it wasn't Vicky I had in mind.

The Admiral straightened himself. "Get your hat and coat, Lily," he said. "I will give you a note for Dr. Bunn. Be sure to bring him back—and say nothing to anyone."

I ran all the way to Dr. Bunn's office. It was still not much past eight, the time for the kitchen breakfast; but he was down and having his in the morning room. The maid told me he couldn't be interrupted, but I cried that I had come from the Admiral, it was urgent. Dr. Bunn must have heard me for he came out of the morning room, a napkin bunched in his hand.

When he had read the Admiral's note he sent the maid to call for John to bring round the carriage, and took me into the morning room where he made me drink a cup of tea. He would have laced it with brandy, but I said "No, thank you, sir," Alfred being temperance.

When we got back to Frederick Street everybody must have heard what had happened—at least, they knew I had run for the doctor.

"I don't know anything," I told them, fighting dizziness. I took some tea and a piece of bread into the pantry. Edwardes said, "Let her be." But I could hardly bear the pantry either; Vicky seemed everywhere here.

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Presently the bell rang and I was sent for, to go upstairs. Mrs. Webb and the doctor were in the morning room. She looked as soft as something carved in stone. She didn't attach much value to Dr. Bunn but here he was giving orders in her house. For he was telling me he couldn't give a death certificate because in his opinion it wasn't a natural death; he was warning me the police would ask questions. "All you have to do, Lily, is answer them truthfully. If you don't know the answer, say so. Don't offer speculations or guesses." And he quoted that bit from the Bible: "Let your yea be yea and your nay nay."

Mrs. Webb said, "I doubt whether my housemaid could tell the authorities more about Victoria than my husband and myself," and Dr. Bunn said, "She is young, too, you understand."

There was a coroner's inquest and I had to give evidence. I remembered what Dr. Bunn had said and just answered yes and no. I did wonder how Vicky could have done such a thing—it was weed-killer, you see, so it must have been a spur-of-the-minute decision—in the light of Miss Bagguley's letter; but I wasn't asked about that, so I didn't mention it.

In fact, the letter wasn't mentioned from start to finish. I kept seeing the Admiral with his hand over his eyes, saying, "How could she? How could she?" There hadn't been any suicide note, and they brought in the usual verdict about the balance of Vicky's mind being disturbed.

Directly after the funeral Alfred got news of his raise and he made me give in my notice and we went nearly 100 miles from St. Frederick Street and I hadn't been back from that day to this—but I never forgot Vicky. . .

I heard myself give a great gusty sigh and I thought how daft I must look, standing there in a sort of dream and staring at an unoccupied old house. I stepped back smartish and nearly tripped a gentleman coming down the hill. He muttered something about dam-fool women, but didn't stop.

I looked across the road. The railings that used to make the Garth look so dignified were gone, but there was a seat on the pavement, for the road rises steeply here and elderly folk are glad of a chance to rest.

I crossed over and sat down. There was a lady sitting at the other end, and when I saw her she made me think of the house again; she looked like some

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outdated fashion plate. A fur maxicoat that made you think of all the kittens you'd loved and lost, a round fur turban, a pink wool scarf tucked into the neck, and high laced-up shoes. Her hair was a suspiciously bright black and her cheeks unusually red, but she couldn't have faked the brightness in her eyes. I saw she was another like myself, and as Vicky would have been if she had lived to grow old; whatever you lose there's always something left.

She must have been watching me, for after a minute she leaned forward to say, "You are interested in Number Four?"

"I used to live there," I said. "That is," I corrected myself sharply, "I was in service there in Admiral Webb's day."

"Then you will remember the scandal?"

"I thought it would be forgotten by now," I said. The Admiral had died some ten years later, 40 years ago, and they were all gone now, even the daughters.

"There's some won't be forgotten," the lady said.

I looked at her again. I didn't believe it! "Miss Bagguley?"

"Mrs. Emerson now. I married after my mother died—twelve years I had and enough. I don't know why people make so much fuss over marriage. You're Lily, aren't you? I knew you at once. You haven't changed, just grown older."

"Do you live here now?"

"In a little boardinghouse near the front. I often come and sit here, wondering if I'll ever know the truth. Could you tell me, Lily? About my letter, I mean."

I drew a deep breath. "There was no letter mentioned."

"I know. I read all the newspapers. What did she do with it, Lily? And don't try and pretend it didn't come, for she sent me a card—the last thing she wrote to anyone, I suppose—and put it in that box on the wall at the back. I'd have helped her, she knew I would, so why did she take the stuff? It wasn't just her, Lily, it was her baby. The way she wrote about that child—"

"Mrs. Webb was going to separate them; she being a minor, you see, she had no powers."

"Vicky would never believe that. She had me and the Admiral would have stood by her. No, I can't believe it."

"The Admiral couldn't believe it, not at first. He stood there whispering, 'How could she? How could she?' But he hadn't seen your letter."

"You think Vicky destroyed it?"

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"Why should she do that?" I asked. "But it vanished—no one knows where. She couldn't have burned it, there was no fire in the schoolroom."

"Perhaps it was to someone else's interest that the letter should disappear. I think if the police had seen that letter, there would have been a different verdict."

I said, bemused, "You think Mrs. Webb destroyed it?"

"I think she'd not have hesitated. But did she have the opportunity? Vicky didn't come down from the schoolroom—that was established—and Mrs. Webb didn't go up. You wouldn't have destroyed it, Lily—so who does that leave?"

"There is only the Admiral, but he—"

"You said he was a long time in the room. It would take a few minutes to read that letter."

"But why should *he* wish to destroy it?"

"Because no one who knew Vicky and had read that letter would believe she'd have taken poison. And did Mrs. Webb see Vicky bring the poison into the house? If so, why didn't she stop her? No, no, Vicky wasn't the only one who had access to the weed-killer."

"You can't think what you're saying, Miss Bagguley."

"Someone put it into the milk or, more likely, into the scones. It wasn't you. Who else had the opportunity?"

I remembered the tray left with Mrs. Webb while I went up to urge Vicky to come down. But I still couldn't take it in.

"The Admiral," I demurred. "You think he saw the letter and took it?"

"There was no one else."

"But why should he destroy it? It would have vindicated Vicky."

"Some victories are not worth their cost. At whose expense could he have vindicated her? A man doesn't accuse his own wife and name his own children as the daughters of a murderess."

I still felt quite dazed. "But why?" I said it again, "*Why?*"

"Because Vicky living would always be a danger to her. Vicky would have defeated her enemies and had the child; she would have brought it down to show to the Admiral. She would have been a perpetual thorn in Mrs. Webb's side, and of course it was humiliating for an old battle-ax like that to be defeated by a girl who scarcely had a name. Oh, I've wondered sometimes if the police guessed more than they let on, but there was no actual proof, and with the letter gone—you said nothing of it, Lily."

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"Dr. Bunn told me only to answer their questions, to volunteer nothing."

"Perhaps he had doubts, too. Oh, never blame the Admiral. Nothing he could have said then would have brought Vicky back, and it's the living who count."

"But they stayed together for more than ten years," I protested. "If he knew all that time—"

"Ah, but she couldn't be sure. She would know what she was, but she could never be certain how much he knew or suspected. Think of it, Lily. Ten years sharing the same room, sitting at the same table, walking beside him to church, never sure when the sword might fall or if it was just your own sense of guilt that made you wait for it. For ten years, Lily. Satan himself couldn't have thought of a better revenge.

"They say that before he died she had shrunk into a shriveled little creature. And—you remember how she used to lay down the law—well, if she got too vocal he would simply look at her and she would dry up like a sudden storm, not a patter of a drop. Man has designed some pretty ingenious torments for his fellow-man, but the Bench of Bishops couldn't have thought up a greater punishment than that. She must often have envied Vicky lying quiet in her grave." She drew a deep breath. "Ten years, Lily. And three hundred and sixty-five days to every year."

She was smiling to herself, then suddenly she stood up. "Come and have lunch with me—I'm going to Anderson's. The dining room there hasn't changed either. There we can recall the happy past. To me, you see, to me Vicky's never been really dead; a spirit like hers is unquenchable."

So we took arms and walked down the hill, two old women remembering the one who would never be old.

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a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

It started out as a nasty case — children in danger. And that kind of case always hit Captain Leopold in his gut, hit him even harder than murder. . .

Captain Leopold and Lieutenant Fletcher have a new associate — Connie Trent, former undercover narcotics agent and now a member (and the best-looking one!) of the Detective Division of the Police Department. . .Will we be hearing more of Connie Trent?

CAPTAIN LEOPOLD GETS ANGRY

by EDWARD D. HOCH

The children had lingered at the playground through most of the morning, enjoying the sudden July sunshine after three days of rain. The young man who paused to watch their playing might have been basking in the sun himself, enjoying a solitary stroll across the park.

After a moment he called out to one of the nearby children. "Liz? You're Liz Lambeth, aren't you? I know your daddy."

The little blonde girl left the others and came cautiously closer. She was nine years old, with a child's curiosity, and the man had a pleasant, friendly face. "You know my daddy?"

"Sure. Come along. I'll take you to him."

She screwed up her face uncertainly. "He's at work!"

"No, he isn't. He's parked right down the road in his truck. You want to see him, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, come with me, then. It's just a little way."

He held out his hand, and after a moment the little girl took it.

The armored car had just pulled up in front of Independent Electronics Corpora-

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tion when the young man left his parked auto and walked quickly toward the entrance. He paced himself well, so that his route intercepted that of the uniformed man who was carrying a heavy white sack in one hand and a drawn revolver in the other.

"George Lambeth," he said, making it a statement and not a question. The guard turned and slowed his pace. In the armored car the driver suddenly became alert. The young man extended his hand, revealing a child's crumpled red T-shirt. "We have your daughter. She'll be dead in ten seconds unless you give me that money."

"What?" The color drained from the guard's face and he glanced toward his partner in the truck.

The driver had his gun out now and was opening the door. "What is it, George?"

"Five seconds, Mr. Lambeth."

"They've got my daughter," Lambeth told the driver. "They've got Liz."

The uncertain driver raised his gun, but the young man stood his ground. "Shoot me and she dies. My partner is watching from that car across the street, and he has a gun at her head."

"Give him the money, George," the driver said.

George Lambeth handed over the heavy white sack. The young man accepted it with a nod and tossed the red T-shirt on the pavement. Then he turned and walked back the way he had come.

In another minute his car disappeared from view around a corner.

Lieutenant Fletcher brought the report to Captain Leopold's desk shortly after one o'clock. "This looks like another one, Captain. He snatched the nine-year-old daughter of an armored-car guard and threatened to kill her if the guard didn't hand over the Independent Electronics payroll."

"How long ago?"

"Just before noon. The girl was released unharmed a few blocks away. They're questioning her now, but it sounds like our loner again. He lured her into his car near the playground, then bound and gagged her and left her on the floor in the back seat."

Leopold nodded. "How much money?"

"Eighty-seven thousand, mostly in small bills. It seems the company maintains a check-cashing service for employees."

"Description fit last week's bandit?"

"Close enough, and the

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modus operandi is identical." A week earlier the son of a supermarket manager had been kidnaped and held for ransom —all the cash in the supermarket safe. Then, too, a lone young man—apparently unarmed—had made the demand for money, and calmly carried it away in a supermarket shopping bag.

"Get those guards down to look at pictures. The little girl, too, if she's able to." Leopold felt a surge of anger at the crimes. There was something about the endangerment of children that hit at his gut the way not even a murder could. Perhaps it was because he had no children of his own. Perhaps this made all of them his children.

Lieutenant Fletcher scratched his head. "I'll do that, Captain. But there's another angle we might check out. Connie Trent was at my desk when the first report came in. She has an idea about it."

"Connie? Send her in."

Connie Trent was easily the best-looking member of the Police Department. Tall and dark-haired, with a constant twinkle in her large brown eyes, she'd managed to charm the entire Detective Division after only six months on the job. But it wasn't only her face and figure that Connie had going for her. A college graduate with a degree in sociology, she had joined the force as an undercover narcotics agent. Her cover had been blown after four months when she helped set up the biggest drug raid in the city's history, but she had continued working among addicts as a known member of the police force. Oddly enough, the people she encountered seemed to show little resentment against her former undercover role. It was almost as if they welcomed the relief that arrest sometimes brought.

Connie still carried a snub-nosed Colt Detective Special in her handbag, but she was unarmed when she entered Leopold's office. The tight green dress she wore was hardly immodest, but Leopold observed that it wasn't designed to hide everything either.

"Good to see you again, Connie," he greeted her, extending his hand. It wasn't his practice to shake hands with women, but he felt somehow that a policewoman was different—especially when she was as attractive and feminine as Connie Trent.

"You've heard about the armored-car robbery?" she asked, getting right to business.

"Fletcher just told me."

"It's the same as last week's supermarket job, and I may

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have a lead for you. I didn't want to say anything till I was certain, but with this second robbery I can't take a chance any longer. Next time this guy might kill a child."

"It's someone you know?" Leopold asked.

"Not exactly." Connie Trent sat down, crossing her long legs. "When I was doing undercover work I met a girl named Kathy Franklin. She was on heroin, and she led me to a lot of the others who were arrested later. I helped Kathy get a suspended sentence, and signed her onto a methadone maintenance program. I've seen her about once a week over the past two months, and she's really straightening herself out. She has a job as a waitress in a bowling alley, down near the Sound.

"Anyway, she has a boy friend named Pete Selby who's still on heroin. I think he's the one who got her hooked originally, though she'd never admit it. I've never seen Pete, so I figure he's been avoiding me. But one night last week when I stopped by to check on Kathy it was obvious Pete had just left."

"How obvious?"

"You know—she was sort of tensed up, and there were cigar butts in the ashtray. I asked her and she admitted he'd been there. In the kitchen there was a shopping bag from the Wright-Way Supermarket. It's way the other side of the city from Kathy's apartment, but there was this bag on the table next to a bottle of rye and two glasses. So when I heard about the robbery the next day I was suspicious. The robber carried the money away in a shopping bag just like that one."

"You didn't report it then?"

Connie Trent shrugged. "You can't convict anyone with just a shopping bag. But he's still on heroin, and that means he needs money. I figure someone would have to need money a great deal to pull anything like these two jobs, with the children."

"She's worth talking to," Leopold agreed. "Want to go there with me?"

"Of course!" Connie said quickly. She seemed honored by the invitation, which surprised Leopold.

"Let's go, then. Fletcher, you talk to the guards and the little girl, see if you get anywhere with the pictures on file."

Kathy Franklin lived in a fourth-floor walkup apartment near downtown. The area was part of a much-delayed urban renewal program that had left the blocks around her building barren and scarred as if by war.

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Here and there a single sickly tree grew, revealed after years of hibernation by the demolition work around it; but for the most part the setting was depressing even on a sunny July afternoon.

Leopold stepped over a shallow puddle of water that had accumulated from the recent rains and followed Connie up the steps of the building. As they climbed to the fourth floor he wondered for the first time if Kathy Franklin was black or white, and he found out when a pretty white girl opened the door to Connie's knock.

"Oh! Come in," she said, her voice a bit reluctant as she stepped aside.

Connie introduced Leopold and explained why they had come. "Today an armored car was robbed, Kathy. By the same person who robbed the supermarket last week."

"I don't know anything about that," Kathy Franklin said, a little too quickly.

Leopold cleared his throat. "We want to ask you about Pete Selby."

"I haven't seen him in months." Too quickly again.

"Miss Franklin, the man who committed these crimes is a particularly vicious person. He endangered the lives of two children. Now you say you haven't seen Pete Selby in months, but you admitted to Miss Trent that you'd seen him just last week."

She shot Connie a deadly glance. "I forgot about that time. He was only here a few minutes."

"He brought a shopping bag with him, from a supermarket that was robbed."

"I asked him on the phone to bring me a loaf of bread and some milk. Are you going to arrest him for that?"

"What about today?" Leopold asked, ignoring her question. "Where was he this morning, just before noon?"

"I told you I haven't seen him, and I meant it." She was suddenly nervous, grabbing for an open pack of cigarettes that slid from her grasp; the cigarettes spilled across the carpet. She cursed and bent to retrieve them.

Connie was on the floor helping her, and Leopold drew back. He wasn't getting anywhere. Perhaps a woman had a better chance with her.

"Look here, Kathy," Connie began, reaching for the last of the cigarettes. "If Pete is involved in these crimes you have to tell us. Can you imagine how you'd feel if one of those child hostages was killed?"

"I don't know anything," Kathy insisted. "Not a thing."

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"Where's Pete living these days, Kathy? Is he shacked up with another woman?"

"*No!*" she screeched from the floor, still on her knees. "He's with Tommy Razenwood!"

"Where?"

"I don't know. They have an apartment somewhere."

Then, as if suddenly remembering Leopold's presence, Kathy got to her feet and lit a cigarette. "I don't know anything about it," she told him. "I don't see Pete any more."

"If he's still on drugs he needs money. Is Razenwood on the stuff, too?"

"I don't know. I know nothing about Razenwood."

Her face was frozen into an expression that told Leopold they had pressed it to the limit. If there was more information to be had, they weren't going to get it from her this afternoon. "All right," he said with a sigh. "Come on, Connie. We'd better be getting back."

The policewoman nodded, then reached out to touch Kathy on the arm. "If you hear anything, Kathy, you have my number. Please call me."

Downstairs Leopold asked, "What do you think?"

"Oh, she's still seeing him. There's no doubt about that. But she may just be covering up his usual drug activities. Until we get an identification from that armored-car driver or the supermarket manager, it's all guesswork."

He had to agree. "Let's get back downtown. Maybe Fletcher had some luck with the witnesses."

Fletcher came into the office almost at once, holding a group of files and mug shots. "We got it, Captain! The driver picked him out, and the manager and the little girl confirmed it."

"Let me guess," Leopold said. "Pete Selby."

Fletcher shook his head. "I struck out on Selby. He was the right age and build, but the wrong face. I was running through some of the people arrested with him in drug raids, though, and I hit a bull's-eye. A guy named Tommy Razenwood."

"Razenwood." Leopold took the picture and studied it. "He and Selby are rooming together somewhere. If we find one we'll find the other." The young man in the photo was grim-faced and sleepy-eyed. His age was 23, the same as Selby's, but he had only one drug arrest, for LSD. There was no evidence that like Selby he was on heroin.

"No known address," Fletcher pointed out.

"Kathy Franklin knows

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where they're holed up. I'm sure of it." He pressed a buzzer on his desk. "And if anyone can get through to her, Connie can."

"You sorta like her, don't you, Captain?"

"Connie? She's an intelligent young woman."

Fletcher winked. "I wasn't talking about her brains."

Connie Trent appeared at the door and smiled at them both. "Something else, Captain?"

"More of the same, I'm afraid. The witnesses identified Selby's roommate, Tommy Razenwood, as the man we want. Do you think you could talk to Kathy again and tell her this, convince her it's Razenwood and not Selby we're after? I'm sure she knows where they are, and at this point she's the only lead we have."

"I'll do what I can, Captain."

After she'd left, Leopold said, "Fletcher, I think we'd better put a twenty-four-hour watch on Kathy Franklin's apartment. If Connie doesn't get anywhere, I still want to know if Selby shows up there again."

"What orders if he does show?"

"Follow him. Tommy Razenwood is the one we're after now."

The next morning, at an hour still too early for most activity, a boy on a bicycle was starting out to deliver the morning newspapers on a quiet residential street near the north edge of the city. His name was Jim MacIves and he was twelve years old. He lived in the big white house on the corner with his parents and his two sisters.

This morning, as usual, he'd been the first one up. His father could sleep another hour before the alarm would ring to rouse him for his job at the bank. By that time young Jim would be back home and ready for breakfast.

The car was waiting at the first intersection, and the young man opened the door to call out, "Got an extra paper I can buy, kid?"

Always thankful for another sale, Jim said, "Sure," and wheeled up next to the car.

That was when the man grabbed him around the neck, yanking him off his bike.

Jim tried to fight back, to break the grip on his throat and keep from being pulled into the car, but the man was too strong. The boy felt something hit him on the side of his head and the strength went out of him. He slipped to the pavement, feet tangled in his bike. The man stepped quickly from the car to lift him inside.

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"What's going on there?" a voice shouted from the ground floor of one of the houses. Even in his dazed condition Jim recognized old Matthews, who always sat by the front window waiting for his paper, even at seven in the morning. "Leave that boy alone!"

Matthews came running up, his slippers slapping on the sidewalk, and the young man straightened to face him. He hit the old man on the side of the head, but harder than he'd hit Jim. Then, as Matthews fell forward on his face, the young man seemed to panic. He kicked the bicycle aside and jumped back in his car, and in a moment he was gone.

Jim tried to shake the pain from his head and stand up. The first thing he thought of was poor old Matthews, who'd come running out to save him.

But it was too late for Matthews now. Looking at him there on the sidewalk, Jim could see he was dead.

Captain Leopold came back to headquarters that afternoon feeling old and tired. Perhaps it was the surge of fresh anger that had swept through him at the sight of the dead old man. Or perhaps it was just the senselessness of it all. Why did it have to happen? Why did people like Tommy Razenwood have to go through their lives robbing and killing?

Connie Trent came in, very quietly, and took the chair that Fletcher usually sat in. "I heard about it," she said simply.

He nodded. "That makes it murder now."

"You're sure it was Razenwood?"

"I'm sure. The boy is the son of a bank manager. Razenwood was after another big haul. And he probably would have made it if that old guy hadn't gotten involved."

"The boy identified Razenwood?"

"Right away. Picked the photo out from a handful I showed him." He stared at the picture on his desk, as if trying to conjure up the physical presence of Tommy Razenwood. "What about Kathy Franklin? Did you talk to her again?"

Connie nodded and crossed her long legs. "Kathy promised to call me here tonight, before eight. She's talking to Pete about turning Razenwood in. I think the decision will be easier after this killing."

"I hope so."

"Do you have someone watching her place?" Connie asked.

Leopold nodded. Then, because his eyes were on her legs, he said, "You should get

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married and settle down, Connie. This is no life for a woman as good-looking as you."

She wrinkled her nose at him. "Is that an offer?"

"Just an observation," he said, realizing he was sounding like an old fool.

They waited until eight o'clock for Kathy's call, with Connie growing increasingly nervous. Fletcher had been out all day, checking known pushers for a line on Selby, but they'd heard nothing from him. It was as if the case had come to a dead end, with only the reporters keeping the phone lines busy, trying for a fresh morning lead on the story.

Then, at 8:15, Kathy Franklin phoned.

Connie motioned Leopold to pick up the extension as she talked. "Hello, Kathy! I was beginning to worry that we wouldn't hear from you."

"I said I'd call, and I'm calling."

"How does it look? Did you talk to Pete?"

A hesitation. Then, "Yes." Very softly.

"Well?"

"We'll do it."

Connie managed to smile at Leopold. "Fine. Where is he?"

"One thing first," Kathy said. "Pete insists on it. Tommy has a lot of friends in town and they might find out what we did. Pete doesn't want to go through life wondering if his next fix might be poisoned. He wants plane tickets out of here for both of us."

Connie looked questioningly at Leopold. He hated to let a junkie off the hook, but at this point they had no evidence against Selby. And they had plenty against Razenwood. He nodded, and Connie said, "Agreed. Where do you want to go?"

"Latin America. He wants two tickets to Mexico City, and then we'll go on from there. Who knows? Maybe it'll be a new life for both of us."

"I hope so," Connie said. "You'll get the tickets when you deliver Tommy Razenwood to us."

"Pete says he can do it tomorrow night. I'll phone you tomorrow and let you know where. Get us out of here on the midnight flight."

"Don't fail us, Kathy. You know it's murder now, and you could both be accessories. It's jail or Mexico, and the choice is yours."

"I know."

Connie hung up and sat facing Leopold. "She'll come through."

"I hate the thought of that guy walking around free for another twenty-four hours."

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"We have no choice, unless Lieutenant Fletcher comes up with a lead."

"We can always hope for that," Leopold said.

But there were no leads from Fletcher. Both Selby and Razenwood seemed to have vanished from the face of the earth. No one had seen them at their usual haunts, and even the pushers insisted they did not know their whereabouts.

"It's a blank wall," Fletcher said the next afternoon.

"Then Kathy Franklin is our only contact. Let's hope she comes through."

"You got the tickets for her?"

Leopold nodded. "Connie has them. But she doesn't turn them over until we have Razenwood."

"So we just wait for the call?"

"There's nothing else we can do. I think the case has been publicized enough to have every parent on guard. We're watching the bus and the train stations, and the airport. Of course if he wants to get in his car and drive down to New York there's no real way we can stop him. That murder might have scared him, though. I don't think he'll try another kidnaping."

All through the early evening Connie Trent waited for Kathy's call. When it finally came, just before seven, the voice on the other end was breathless. "Look, Tommy's got a gun. He's planning to leave town tonight, but he's coming here first to pick up Pete's car."

"He'll be at your apartment?"

"Downstairs, in the street. The car is a blue '69 Ford, license number 8M-258. I'll walk out with him to the car, then you can grab him. Be careful, though. He'll use the gun if he has to."

"We'll be careful," Connie said. "You just get out of the way when the police move in. He has a habit of taking hostages, and we don't want you to be one of them."

When she'd hung up, Leopold buzzed for Fletcher. "I want cars blocking both ends of the street, and I want men on foot nearby. It's a bad place for a stakeout, because there are no other buildings."

"I'll handle it, Captain, but we can't move in too early. If he sees too much activity he'll get suspicious and stay away."

"Use unmarked cars, and plainclothesmen. Keep the uniforms out of sight. I'll go in your car."

"What about me?" Connie asked.

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"If he starts shooting it might be a dangerous place for a woman."

"I was the one who gave you the lead, Captain—remember?"

"All right," he said with a sigh. "You can ride with us, but you stay in the car." He supposed he had to start treating her like a man sometime.

The summer night was hot and humid, with a forecast of possible thunderstorms in the area. It was the sort of night that would have brought the people of Kathy Franklin's neighborhood into the streets for a breath of air, if there were still any people there. As it was, only one old woman sat on the steps in front of the apartment house, staring up the street at the piles of rubble and the sickly trees. Perhaps, thought Leopold, she was remembering the way it had looked before urban renewal. Or imagining how it might look in the future, after she was gone.

"What do you think?" Fletcher asked as they drove by the building. "Want me to get her out of there?"

"No. He could be watching."

"From where?" Connie asked. "There's not another building within three blocks."

"Let's wait. It's getting dark. Maybe the old woman will go inside."

Because there was no place for cover, the unmarked cars had to remain some blocks away with their motors running, ready to move in. Fletcher's car drove through the area twice, and then they transferred to another vehicle that wouldn't look familiar. This time the old woman was gone from the steps, and the street was quiet.

"It's after nine," Fletcher said. "Still think he'll come?"

Leopold watched the street lights going on, casting their harsh white glow over the shadowed jagged foundations. Before he could answer, a blue Ford turned into the street and parked in front of Kathy's building.

"That's the car!" Connie said.

"Right." Leopold dropped a hand to the pistol on his belt, then took it away. "But it's Kathy driving. And it looks as if she's alone."

"Think he's already inside?" Fletcher asked.

"I don't know. Let's wait and see what happens. She said he'd be leaving in that car. Maybe he's not here yet."

They had fifteen minutes to wait before Kathy reappeared on the steps with a man. He stood in the shadows, glancing both ways on the street, before finally hurrying down to the

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car. She went with him to the car door and closed it after he slid behind the wheel. Then she moved back a few steps, waving goodbye to him.

"Let's move!" Leopold shouted into the police radio. "All cars!"

The Ford started from the curb, moving slowly at first. It seemed to hesitate and almost stop, then Fletcher rounded the corner and the Ford took off. Two blocks away the police cars screeched into position, cutting off his escape.

"He's stopping!" Connie said. "We've got him bottled up!"

"Stay here and keep down. Come on, Fletcher."

Then they were out of the car and running, their guns drawn. The Ford hesitated between them and the police at the end of the street, and Leopold shouted, "Police, Razenwood! You're surrounded!"

Suddenly he gunned the engine and veered to the left, over the curb, smashing through a board sign and across the rubble of a vacant lot.

"He's getting away, Captain!"

Leopold fired two quick shots and started to run. On the next block they were firing, too, and he saw the Ford's rear window shatter. The car hobbled across the brick-strewn lot and suddenly burst into flames as more bullets found their mark.

"He's trying to get out," Leopold shouted, racing forward. But the flames were too hot. The entire car was enveloped in fire, and there was no chance for anyone to get out alive.

Fletcher ran up then, and Connie, and presently Kathy came across the lot to where they stood. "Oh, my God," Kathy cried, "did you have to do it like that?"

"One way's as bad as another," Leopold said grimly.

They went back to Captain Leopold's office for coffee, and he sat glumly staring at Tommy Razenwood's file on the desk before him. "I don't like it to end this way, either, damn it! But the man was a kidnaper of children and a murderer! Maybe he didn't deserve any better."

"I didn't say a word," Fletcher mumbled. "How do you like your coffee, Connie?"

"Black, thanks."

Fletcher came back in a moment with her coffee. Then he reached across the desk to pick up the files on Razenwood and Selby. But Leopold reached out to clutch them a moment longer. "What about it? What do you to think?"

"You fired first, Captain. If

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you hadn't, maybe the others might have held their fire. But, hell, I'd have done the same thing. You can't fool around with killers."

Leopold barely heard the words. He was staring at the file on Pete Selby, seeing the notation under *Known Habits:*

Nonsmoker, nondrinker, addicted to heroin, frequents race tracks.

He read the words again. They seemed to have some meaning he couldn't quite comprehend. "You can't blame yourself," Connie was saying.

Nonsmoker, nondrinker, addicted to heroin.

"Maybe I could have handled it differently," he replied, wondering why the words of the report fascinated him so. It wasn't even Razenwood's file, but Selby's. The file belonged to the wrong man.

Wrong man.

"Connie?" Go slow now. Take it easy.

"What is it, Captain?"

"You told me about your visit to Kathy Franklin that first time, when you suspected she was seeing Selby. Remember?"

"Yes."

"You knew he'd just left because Kathy was tensed up and there were cigar butts in the ashtray and they'd been drinking. But Pete Selby doesn't smoke or drink, not according to his file."

"Maybe he just started," she said with a shrug, but Fletcher was leaning forward, studying the file.

"And you mentioned the shopping bag, too. If a man has just robbed a supermarket and carried the money away in a shopping bag, would he bring the bag home and give it to his roommate?"

"He'd get rid of it as soon as he was finished with it," Fletcher said.

"Exactly! And if the bag was at Kathy's apartment it means the money was probably brought there, too."

"But we know it was Tommy Razenwood who stole the money. The manager identified him, and so did everyone else. You mean he gave the money to Selby to take to Kathy's apartment?"

Leopold shook his head. "Remember the cigar butts? There's a much more likely explanation. Razenwood took it there himself. He was probably hiding in the closet when you arrived, Connie. Kathy was willing to admit that Selby had just left because it wasn't true."

Fletcher almost spilled his coffee. "Damn it, Captain, if the Franklin girl was in on the robbery with Razenwood, why

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should she finger him for the police and fly off to Mexico with Selby?"

"Why, indeed?" Leopold asked. He was already on his feet. "If we hurry, we can just about catch that midnight plane before it takes off."

Kathy Franklin was at the gate, just handing in her tickets, when Leopold reached her. "I came to say goodbye, Kathy."

She whirled, pale as death. "What—?"

"Where's your traveling companion?"

Then he saw Tommy Razenwood, standing to one side with a magazine partly obscuring his face. Tommy saw Leopold at the same moment and seized Kathy. In an instant he had his arm at her throat, with a knife in his free hand.

"Tommy!" she screamed.

"Out of the way, cops! Try to take me and she dies!"

Leopold stood his ground. "Kathy's not some nine-year-old child, Tommy. Kill her if you want, but we're taking you."

He moved then, as Fletcher came in from the other side. Razenwood shoved Kathy into Leopold and tried to run, but Fletcher brought him down with a waist-high tackle that sent the knife flying from Razenwood's grip.

Then they had the handcuffs on him, as Connie moved in to grab Kathy.

"No Mexico trip after all," Leopold told her. "You made me kill the wrong man."

"He would have knifed me!" She turned to spit at Razenwood, who had ceased to struggle in Fletcher's grip.

"So it was Pete Selby who died in the burning car," Connie said.

Leopold nodded. "A dark street, a closed car, a man fleeing after she'd fingered him as Razenwood—that's all it took to start us shooting. She'd already made sure of that by warning us he had a gun and would use it. Of course Pete Selby was fleeing because he was carrying heroin, not because he was a murderer. Razenwood had taken Selby's place in Kathy's bed, so they figured it was only right for Selby to take his place in the morgue."

Two uniformed police officers appeared then, to help them get their prisoners out of the terminal. The scattering of midnight travelers turned to stare at the proceedings. "How'd they know the car would burst into flames like that and prevent easy identification of the body?" Fletcher asked.

"I imagine it was soaked in

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gasoline, with a few extra cans in the trunk. Selby hesitated as he started the car, remember. He may have smelled the gasoline."

It was in the police car going downtown, with Razenwood seated between Leopold and Fletcher, that Leopold asked him a question. "What if our bullets had missed, Tommy? What if Selby had stopped the car and tried to surrender before it caught fire?"

He lifted his eyes and stared straight ahead. "That wouldn't have happened, cop. I was on the roof of the building with a rifle, just to make sure he didn't. I don't know if it was you or me who drilled the trunk and set off that gasoline. But I guess it didn't make any difference to Selby."

"No," Leopold agreed, "I guess it didn't."

"Q"

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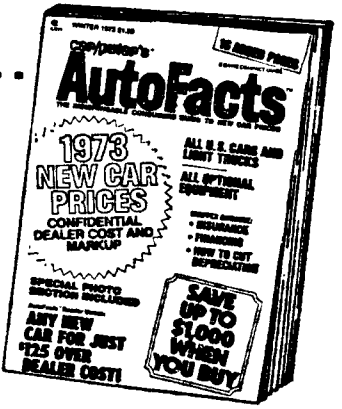

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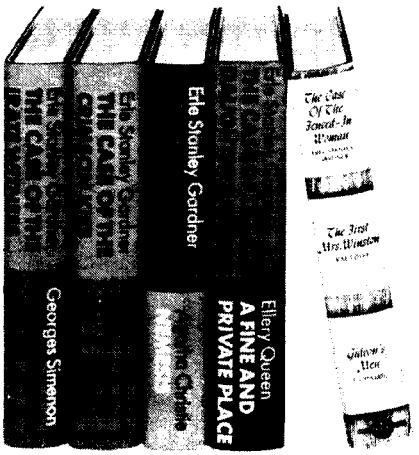

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